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THROUGH MY GARDEN GATE

THROUGH MY GARDEN GATE

BY

NEWMAN FLOWER



CASSELL & COMPANY
LIMITED
LONDON · TORONTO · SYDNEY
AND MELBOURNE



First published 1945

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN AT
THE CURWEN PRESS, PLAISTOW
F.1244



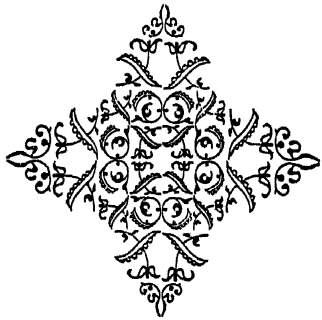
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A CREED IN A GARDEN

I believe in the God of my garden, the God of the trees,
The God with the feet of the fairy who treads on the breeze
And makes of the rose-leaves a carpet. The God of the Light,
The God of the dusk and the sunset; the God of the Night
Who freshens the scents in my garden with breaths of the earth,
And juggles and frets with the tulip and brings it to birth.
I believe in the God of the thorn-bud, the God of the bird
Who fashions a song from an egg-shell; of the new world stirr'd
By the sudden comfort of April; the God of all grief
In the whimpering pain and the death of the leaf.
I believe in the God of the sky-paths, whose cumbersome cloud
Shakes warm, laughing rain o'er my garden and whispers aloud
To the slumbering ant and the earthworm, to the uttermost weed
His challenge of Life and Achievement—*That is my creed.*

To see one's garden under snow is the full assurance that God has dropped down the 'safety curtain' before what is going to be a wonderful performance.



THE GARDEN OF A THOUSAND JOYS

THAT is the only name for the garden which is loved by the person who works in it. To any gardener whose heart is dug into that garden it is the garden of a thousand joys.

If you are that kind of gardener this piece of your life—and it is a piece of your life—never lets you down. The remarks in this book are addressed to those like myself who work in our gardens—just sheer love and sweat and toil.

But there is another kind of gardener—a sort of hydrated gardener. The wealthy persons who, when our borders are a splash of colour, which are blazing back a dividend to us for what we have done, come and pass pretty remarks, and say how much better the same thing looks in their gardens where they work not at all, but aged menials do.

Any gardening mechanic can make a garden. And anyone can read the heart—or the lack of it—of the person who made it when the garden comes to flowering. It may be ordered, staid and mechanical, blossoming according to plan. Or it may contain little spots of loveliness where someone has planted his thoughts.

That is what a garden means to me—a beloved place where one toils and plants one's thoughts. Individual endeavour born of love makes the real garden—that wonderful place of a thousand joys.

I have been 'gardening' indoors the whole of this winter. All we garden-lovers do. The winter planning is a definite part of the gardener's year. His garden would not

be a success without this winter planning. So, like most of the gardening tribe, I've been hunting through the new seed catalogues, packeting up desirable seeds I have saved from last Autumn, and planning out on sheets of paper my Spring beds and Summer beds. Tearing the sheets up. Starting again . . . That's better. It wanted a dash of yellow there. . . . A clump of scarlet pitched in here like a sudden blazing fire. . . . I might be designing a lady's dress—except that it is far more wonderful. And—when I come to think of it—I suppose my garden is my lady. In these dark nights I am planning for her such a marvellous dress as she never had before in any summer. It is going to be the most wonderful dress she ever knew.

But will it be right? Last year was a dull summer. So, perhaps, this year will be warm and dry. I will give to my garden plants for the borders and beds that will stand up to heat, revel in it. I will make her fling her head full joyous to the sun as if to say: 'Thank God for your heat!'

Well, we've planned the clothing of our garden for the Summer during these dark months of black-out. We've fashioned these things for sheer loveliness. But possibly there will come a wet summer. The gorgeous sort of Ascot dress you made for my Lady Garden is a mess. She becomes peeved. Gardens can be very peeved.

A wet summer and she is all grumbles.

'Where are the plants which would make some sort of mackintosh? Do you think it never rained since the Flood? Look at all the colour of my clothes beaten down. Smashed. And the beds like an over-flowed bath!'

You cannot console her. You did it—you arranged it all during the black days of winter.

But presently a warm sun breaks through after a June deluge. In a gentle wind the flowers seem to shake themselves, as if laughing after some urchin has turned a hose on them out of sheer mischief.

My Lady Garden smiles—then laughs. The sun makes her laugh her forgiveness. She makes peace by throwing bouquets of scent in big doses as the sun warms her to sweet temper.

I am thinking about all this whilst the snow still lies on the ground, waiting to go. I have planned my lady's dress. Will it be right or wrong? I don't know. And not knowing is the sport of the game.

That is what we do, we garden workers. When we love this Garden of a Thousand Joys we forget that she is our mistress. Mark that, you respectable people. She is our mistress—but in all decency we must not admit it!

Emerson wrote (in *The Conduct of Life: Wealth*):

'A garden is like those pernicious machineries which catch a man's coat-skirt or his hand, and draw in his arm, his leg, and his whole body to irresistible destruction.'

True, Wealth makes rich gardens. It makes gardens which people pay a shilling a head to go to see. But seldom indeed do such gardens contain the heart of the person who had it made—unless it be that of the head gardener.

The gardens we working-gardeners create are little colonies of our hearts. Every tree, every bush, every plant has a separate entity: an individuality. In tending it, it becomes a piece of ourselves. We know these living things in our colony only thrive or fail to thrive by the measure of our colonization.

Every plant has a mind. Sometimes it is not easy to discover, but if you work in your garden and know your

plants you discover it. If you tend that plant with care it gives you a partnership in its life. It may pass with the winter, to leave some descendant, some seed that will create another of its tribe to follow on with you. If it be a tree, it will be kindly to you because you know so little less than it happens to know about the length of life, but think you know so much more.

To work in one's garden is Tomorrow. To remember it is Yesterday.

Some men work their gardens according to the plan of Yesterday. They become a habit to their gardens. Any amateur gardener who persists, year by year, in setting out his plants in the same places because he has always planted them so, unconsciously accuses God of providing only one set of scenery for his garden.

But if he changes, and ever changes, and thereby uses the imagination which was born to him in the First Garden, he will discover more adventure than he ever knew. And he will find that the Head Gardener has provided him with more sets of scenery than he can ever put on in a lifetime.

It is only when he works in his garden that he discovers the endless mission of a garden's life.

When you come to think of it, a garden is the most desirable gamble in the world. The only gamble in which you can set your losses against your gains and know—very truly know—that you usually come out well ahead on balance. You will have to cut some losses, but you probably cut more in your business. This May frost will cut you down badly; next year's gentle smile from May—that temperamental maid—may give you a glut. And perhaps you do not want that glut! Any garden is a lovely gamble where you back the Red and the Red comes up most times out of ten.

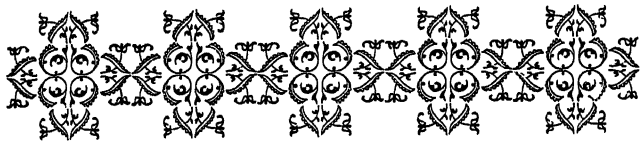
Nevertheless I met a man the other day who said that he toiled and sweated in his garden nine months out of the year with the result that it hatched out three months of disappointment. A gardening oddity, that fellow. If he had three months of disappointment year by year, then he should revise his rudiments of gardening.

No garden ever responds to the exact pattern you plan for it, and no garden ever will. I have been gardening for over forty years, and still I do not know why my garden does not blossom in full accordance with the detail I schemed. It is better that I do not know. It would kill the joy of the annual adventure. For every garden to the person who loves it is a great adventure.

And I suppose any garden is God's jig-saw puzzle. Were it not so, many might never see God in a garden.

If everything went according to plan any gardener might think he had done the whole job himself. Perhaps he would forget the fact that he is only an employee who works for a Master.

The first snowdrop is the virgin of any garden. She will rise from a white bed. Her lips are uncoloured. She hangs her head as if—at the time of her rising—she is receiving with humility and gratitude the Divine beatitude on the whole garden for the coming year.



SPRING SONG

THERE is a weft of magic about that first snowdrop.

This small blossom may have pushed its way through a mound of snow as a little light of loveliness waiting to be noticed. Or it may have arisen, with its small bunch of greenery, from a cleft between two protecting boulders in the rock garden. It has only one message—the blinds of winter are being pushed up.

To many gardeners this sprig of blossom is the plain announcement that Spring is here. Much as I love the snowdrop, I dislike her propaganda for Spring. I prefer to salute her beauty and await what happens. For the first spring weeks have such a devilish conspiracy with Winter now dying in the throes of bitterness.

The following crocus—the yellows, then the 'Baron Brunows' and the 'Mont Blancs'—spreading to the certain carpets you planned for them—would convince you that Winter will not happen any more till next November. The crocus is a particular liar in its propaganda. In the sweetness of a day of sudden warmth in the garden it throws its petals wide back like a lovely lady in languor. Tired out with weariness and passion of the heat! Sheer pose. Just to convince you that Winter has gone—perhaps for ever!

I may be one of the unbelievers in the antics of these flowers. They are very lovely. They do their job, just as a monkey rides on a pony's back in a circus because it must. But not all flowers come up because they must.

Some delay their action from this week for a month, because of action in the weather. I suppose the snowdrop and the crocus are so persistent in appearing, according to plan, that it is a scheme devised between them to flash enthusiasm to the man who enjoys his garden. To make him think that Spring—the virgin he waits for—is at his door.

I never believe in the coming of Spring till I see the first violets. Now, here's a flower for you! It gives you all you need—colour, perfume, glory. In Spring our ladies pin them full of the incense of heaven to their clothing. To the suffering, one carries them. They are always lovely and unchanged. Everyone loves a violet. It is the flower of my heart.

Shakespeare, Tennyson, E. B. Browning, Thomas Hood, Lowell, Le Gallienne, and many another poet, have all written verses about the violet.

They have expounded the beauty of the flower. But they have never explained why the violet is one of the very few plants God has not allowed Man to tamper with.

Roses can be cross-bred into new and wonderful shades. Man can create a differing flame in a dahlia. But the violet remains always the same flower.

Once, in Iceland, I spent an evening with the famous Icelandic writer, Sigadur Nordal. He said this to me:

'Your English language has so changed through the ages that no youth of your country can pick up an Elizabethan manuscript and read it. But an Icelandic boy of fourteen can read with ease an Icelandic manuscript written eight hundred years ago. Our language has never been adulterated.'

It is just that way with the violet. It has never been adulterated.

What the famous Swede, Theodor Dahl, who gave his name to the Dahlia, would say if he came back and saw the blaze of many-coloured dahlias in our gardens I do not know. Or, perhaps, I do. He would say that modern horticultural science had crowned him—or broken him. To him, the original dahlias may have been God's creation; the modern dahlias Man's fantastics.

We may be able to produce larger heads of blossom on our violets as the result of horticultural study. But by all our study we cannot alter the manner of this flower or its colouring. It is so perfect that Man cannot improve upon it.

None of these poets has referred to the fact that the violet is the most friendly flower that grows in our gardens. It loves the small starved patch of the poor man who is struggling to live, just as it does the garden of the millionaire. It likes to be around human habitation in the same manner as the starling prefers to nest where humans live.

The violet has a habit of suddenly appearing in one's garden from nowhere. It peers at one—perhaps for the first time—through a glitter of frost. It digs itself in. It forms a big family almost before one knows it has arrived.

Violets can be a plague of beauty. White violets travel my rock-garden with speed and persistence. It may be that—as the violet is my favourite flower—I do not cope with them as strictly as I should. But when I found them destroying a patch of Ramondias in the shady side of my rock-garden recently, I had to stop down this aggressive search for new colonies. The violets must conform to the League of Species.

Yesterday I was faced with another problem. A few years ago I noticed a little root of white violets blossoming at the foot of a small bush-rose. It had suddenly arrived, as violets do. All violets are welcome visitors, so I did not apply sanctions.

The root grew with the years. But yesterday I observed that the violet colony was like a mound of snow in the profusion of its blossoming. The single root has created a colony more than a yard wide—and the rose-bush was being smothered.

I suppose I ought to have dug the violets out of it. But so many hundred faces of beauty looked at me as if to say: '*We can't all be wrong!*'

So the rose-bush and the violets must get on with their fight. I will not be the arbiter in a conflict I did not make. And I might be biassed if I were.

* * * *

The garden, working to life, under the first flames of Spring is all sweetness and discovery. Every moment in it is discovery. The waking insect life is scarcely noticeable until the weather warms. Then you have the sudden knowledge of things beginning to live, to love, to move, to hum. A few more days of sun, and there comes that wild chorus of insect life, so near, and yet seemingly so far away. You hear the sound of a thousand wings—a certain melody, growing, and growing stronger and sweeter and nearer with that uprising song of the Earth. A chorus—a serene chorus of subdued violins—behind the growing pageant which is about to begin in the garden.

Yesterday was just one of those days of blazing sun which Spring can fling upon you. The birds were in enchantment, and the chorus of passion-ridden insects reminded me of the copy of their sound which Handel has so brilliantly made in the orchestral accompaniment to the chorus 'He sent all manner of flies' in his *Israel in Egypt*—or *Exodus* as this work was called by him.

As I went down towards my garden gate, I saw an odd thing. One of my garden companions is my peacock, who follows me about when I am gardening; gives a

friendly 'Chok-chok' or two when he thinks I am intruding on his preserves. Now, in the heat he was sitting on a large ornamental garden vase, his tail draped down so that he could show the world that there was no tail like unto his tail. For real gorgeous colour there was no tail like unto his tail. He knew it. As I stood and looked at him he knew I was admiring him. He was in traditional pride. Then suddenly, I saw a bumble bee alight on one of the coloured rings in his tail. It stayed a moment, then passed to another. It went on to three more. Then, apparently bored, it flew away.

I do not know whether that bumble was just so full of Spring Song that it thought these splashes of colour were newly-arisèn flowers; specially created for him; made for him. Or whether the bumble had a sense of colour greater than his sense of smell, and had thereby been led off his course in the riot of a Spring day to just go mad on colour.

It is the birds which follow the first burst of bloom who are the referees of the spring game. You need never time Spring's arrival by the flowers, but you can by the birds. They do not cavil with the weather. They announce Spring by the calendar. When Winter, with a last vicious plunge, forces its dying finger into Spring, some flowers may become sulky and halting, as if to await the moment when, this ghost of a season to which they have never belonged, has truly fled.

Living in a house which has its piece of garden about it, these birds seem to come as migrants to an island when Spring approaches. It is my island. They take possession of my trees. After the first odd bits of song at late winter—like a flutist trying out a note or two on his flute before the orchestra—they become a colony.

They are the singers settling in for the 'Hallelujah Chorus'. I am suddenly made aware that this Spring Song

business is about to take place whilst I lie enchanted listening, and cannot correct a single note! It is the loveliest chorus in the world, and I am in the stalls. Or, better still, in bed. And since one can lie in bed and hear the loveliest chorus in the world, why can't we have beds at Covent Garden and listen to far inferior singing to that which comes from any garden? Man was always a poor singer beside a bird.

There is a big cedar outside my bedroom window, and some singers—chosen singers they seem to be—get into that tree. You will not listen to anything finer than their singing at 5 a.m., even if you travel to Rome to hear the Sistine Choir.

I lay awake this morning listening to the beginning of birds' voices around the cedar. I timed it. A thrush began at 4.27. Another thrush on some distant tree took up the challenge. A blackbird broke in. A dozen birds broke in. In half an hour the 'Hallelujah' was being sung to perfection by a hundred birds. And even the starlings on the chimney had begun to wander up the scale with that delicious little scream of ecstasy.

In listening to these birds in my garden o'mornings I have come to the conclusion that the thrush has eighteen different phrases in its singing. This morning I could only count twelve distinct and different phrases. The notes which suggest in words 'Did you—did you—did you?' recurred in this thrush's song about every fifth or sixth phrase. The 'Bring it here—bring it here—bring it here' phrase occurred once in every eight phrases.

So I went down to my train very pleased with the day because I felt that I had discovered something.

There are thousands of people going to work this morning who possess no garden in which to discover anything. But they are quite happy people. They share with me, so many of them, the sheer joy of going to the common round 'sung' into their jobs by the wild impassioned

singing of the loveliest chorus in the world—this chorus coming from other people's trees as they pass by.

Spring Song!

No more, no less. These singers have never known the meaning of a war. Their song is escapement, natural, and thousands of years old. The same song unchanged. Belonging to that world which we are trying to escape back to. And in a thousand years that song will be the same.

Spring song.

We take it as it comes, but I suppose one day we'll begin to understand all that it means to us.

I saw—or rather heard—a strange thing in my garden a few days ago.

A blackbird has been following me around for days as I worked on my borders. It was collecting worms from the overturned earth. What for, I knew. What for, it did not want me to know. Fear! Fear! The awful driving power that is the worst curse of the world.

It came to a piece of newly-turned earth, waited, looked at me, cocked its head on one side. We garden people have always noticed this suspicion of a blackbird when it is trying to lie to us that it does not possess a nest, and never had one! And as for young, why, it has always been sworn to celibacy!

I watched this bird following me around. Most birds are bad liars. This one particularly so, since it had two worms in its beak which it did not swallow. I began to

throw some small worms out on to the grass. It approached by easy stages of diplomacy and collected them. Then with a full bunch it flew off.

He pitched in the rose-garden and watched me as carefully as I watched him. Did I think he had a nest in the rose-garden? If so, he had a new thought coming to him. Then, feeling that the situation had a lull—it might be only a temporary lull—he flew away to the place of his nest.

I went on trowelling. Presently the bird came back. It came closer as I dropped the worms more closely to myself. I was going to experiment with that bird. I meant to tame it. Ultimately it came so close to me that it began to take small worms from the trowel. It gathered up eight or ten. It seemed now to have no fear of me at all. Then, with its mouth full, it flew to a nearby rose-pergola and, to my amazement, broke into a short warble of a dozen notes or so.

Frankly, I did not believe that a bird, with a mouthful of worms, could utter any note. I watched it fly away. This time it ceased to lie, and flew to the blackthorn hedge that separates me from my neighbour. I looked around for some sort of 'super' bird whose note I might have mistaken for those of my friend. There was no blackbird in sight.

Again the blackbird returned. I fed it with all the worms it wanted from the trowel this time. Again it went to the rose-pergola with a wriggling mass in its mouth, cocked its head at me, looked at me with its yellow eye, and broke into a short and beautiful warble. Then it flew to the blackthorn hedge—where I later discovered its nest of young—without trying to delude me by funny habits in the rose-garden. It had grown to know me. Better still—it had grown to *trust* me. That is what I set out to do.

'Strange, beautiful unquiet thing,
Lone flute of God.'

Still I could not understand how any bird could give a note of thanks for food when its mouth was full of food. I threw down my trowel, just as the blackbird came back for a further portion. I went to the man who helps me in my garden. I told him of what had happened. And instead of being as puzzled as I, he smiled.

'That's all right, Sir,' he said. 'They do that. You know that robin that follows us round the garden?'

'Yes.'

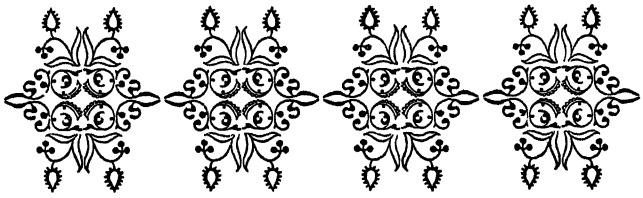
'He does that when his mouth is full at this time of the year. He gets up on a bough and says something about it before going home with what he's got!'

The manners of these creatures in our gardens! Perhaps we humans would say to our host—and mean it—after a first-class dinner: 'A thousand thanks: it's been a good evening!'

I once saw a small child of nine or ten go up to the Father after having been given a supper of soup at a London Catholic charity, and say to him:

'Father, that was lovely soup!'

I suppose that was the nearest thing I have ever known to a human being putting its real gratitude to the simple level of my blackbird.



TO ANY APRIL

My dear April,

You have a place in the calendar which is supremely your own. You have a different 'personality' to the other months of the year. To anyone who has a garden you are some beautiful forerunner of Summer.

I believe there are some gardeners who regard you almost as the 'saint' of the months. You seem to fling the frozen mantle of Winter from the garden. You break the cold rough clutch of Winter's hands. Then you wander round the garden with dainty fingers, touching this tree, this shrub. You make the red shoots green. You measure up a vast *clientèle* of trees, shrubs and what-not for their Summer suits.

But since I am writing this note just before you come to my garden again, my dear April, I would like to have a few plain words with you. You are a young girl just coming on to the stage, and I am old enough to be your 'uncle'.

. . . Oh, yes, I am. I have seen many generations of your forebears come to my garden. Some have been sweet and kind; others have been charged with ugliness and the silliness of stupid pranks. As a worker in a garden I have considerable suspicion about your tribe. I always had. You are lovely, but I suspect you. I have reason to suspect you.

You are a young girl with great sweetness, with much petulance and many moods. No more. No less. By some tradition, which I consider to be ill-founded, you begin the gardener's working year. For any gardener believes in you. Though he has been cheated time after time by your ancestors, he still believes that you will be better than your forebears.

So you are about to come in state, as your forebears did, to any garden. You will walk over a carpet of primroses. Rows of daffodils will blaze gold beside your path. You will run your fingers down my hedges as you pass, and they will spring to green at your touch. You will start us off again, with faith in you, to make a garden more glorious than before.

But you are a young girl, April. I suppose that by human calculation you would be about twenty-three. And now, when you have begun to settle down, you will start your tantrums. We sow seeds under your thin warm suns. You fling a flood of water over them and wash them out and hide yourself behind a cloud laughing.

You become friendly again. You gain forgiveness by your warmth and the rare colour of your green garment. You know that no other month can produce such a colourful garment again, except October. And you do not care much about October because, with true feminine thought, you remember that you were the 'first arrival' at the pageant. Like any girl, it means all the world to you to be first in a beautiful dress.

You become winsome and quiet. We plod on in our gardens with the same old faith. But you're only twenty-three. You get a new mood. You become tired of daffodil-yellow. You think you would look better in white—with yellow attachments peeping out.

So then you pile down a few days of snow. You make some wonderful dresses out of this snow. The first tulips are lovely spots of red in your white cloak. And the blue

'Grand Maître' hyacinths make a fine combination with white.

My dear young girl, you are a perfect dress artist in your fashion. Like a woman who wears a rare fur coat that has cost twenty of God's animals agony in the traps—you are a great artist in your dresses, made by the destruction of flowers to your moods.

You do not like these remarks, dear April. Of course you don't. And I will tell you one thing, which you will hate still more.

In all a gardener's year you are the one month a man believes in. Always believes in. Your ancestors may have been 'roughhouse' in their time. And we have had to put up with a lot from them.

But, though you may bring nothing but sweetness, you must remember that a better child of the calendar follows you . . . Yes, I thought you would shrug your shoulders. . . . We name so many of our women after her. She, too, has her pranks. She has her moods. But none so violent as yours.

You are a very lovely girl, April. I would like to carry you away to some desert island and tame you, and make you run your fingers over the trees, and keep you hurrying round all the time beside bush and plant. But you must remember that you are only the forerunner of May.

So I put into two lines what I think of you, ere you come to me:

'Now gone is the mood of December, the charlatan
Dark draws away;
God mixes His colours in April, and paints hi
pictures in May.'

In the deluge of rain of a late Spring I went out to my garden, clad in a mackintosh. I was obsessed by the feeling that I must 'garden' somehow, even if I got pneumonia by doing it.

I discovered that my border seeds had been washed out by the rain, and were floating down a muddy flood. And, as I looked, I saw that certain tender plants I had nursed so carefully through the Winter had now thrown out white shriven roots that lay on a pulp of brown earth. My border was a mess.

I was looking at it, and wondering what I could do, when a pair of turtle doves flew down with quiet wings on to the cedar which overhangs the border. They looked at me. I looked at them. We exchanged cards, so to speak.

I watched them sitting like two dummies on a bough, staring at me with their quick eyes. They were perched closely together, and seemed so intent on watching me.

I looked at the rivulets of water running down my border, and I looked at these two birds. Then presently I addressed them. I said:

'One of your ancestors did this before. But, really, you are not on Mount Ararat now, though you may think you are. Where is your olive-branch, anyway? Have you mislaid it somewhere? And are we going to have more rain?'

They continued to look at me in stupid silence. They watched me push the washed-out roots into the mud-flat the rain had made. Then, thinking, perhaps that I was not desirable company—or, it may have been because they realized that they had forgotten to bring the olive-branch, they flew away, and left me to the havoc.

When the rains passed I re-sowed my border. I forgot about those turtle doves. But one day, when Summer

warmed, they came back again, bringing a lovely pair of young, and settled once more on the cedar-tree above the border.

They had brought the olive-branch!

They knew they had. And the four of them sat in a line on the bough for an hour whilst the master of the family told me all about it.

In the Garden of Gethsemane Christ stood in loneliness because of the helplessness of Mankind.

Today, any owner of any garden, or any orchard, will, in the turmoil of his distress, protest in no unmeasured terms against a frost in May which has swept all promise of fruit from his trees.

He may whine and cry aloud to a God who has seemingly forgotten him, and has no care for his hurt.

Perhaps he has overlooked the Lonely Figure in a solitary garden. One who gave no whine nor cry, when that for which He had worked—and for which He was about to yield His life—seemed to have been destroyed by the frozen ignorance of Mankind.

A freak wallflower came up in my garden. He was like a powdered clown. He was the most 'different' wallflower I have ever seen. All the other wallflowers, regular to their tribe, looked askance at him. He was an Ishmael.

I left him where he was born because he was a freak. The Summer beat him to raggedness. The Winter came and beat him harder to a slender frozen stem. Snows fell upon him with the heaviness of death. For he was an Ishmael and, stripped now, seemed to suffer not.

But Nature is very kind to Ishmaels; they are only an eccentric part of herself. Next Spring this freak wallflower blossomed again where I had planted it. It was a bigger buffoon then ever near the blazing patches of 'Fire King' and 'Cloth of Gold'.

It seemed so solitary and unhappy—so much an Ishmael—that I resolved to propagate it. Next year I had made a small beautiful bed of its kind. Odd, but lovely in its difference.

I replanted this old root in the bed with its offspring. He should reign over his tribe.

The year I made that bed and laid out that colony of his descendants, those busy-bodies—the red ants—made a nest under his roots and killed him. But his swan-song was a bed of strange wallflowers in the heat of Spring.

Visitors said to me: 'That's a strange wallflower. What's its name?'

I replied that I did not know. That wallflower had no name. It was a freak, and this bed of flowering plants was its tribe. A tribe without a name. Ishmaels.

The red ants wiped out the chief of a tribe, reared their young under its roots and departed. They had used a wallflower for what they regarded as their natural purpose, and left no memorial to the Unknown Soldier. But, in accordance with the purpose of Life, its descendants went on and probably forgot the founder.

THE MAGNIFICENT LIFE OF A NUISANCE

SOME years ago I decided to build a rock garden.

It began badly. The contractor from whom I had bought the stone flopped down several tons of it outside my gate on a late November afternoon. Here was a mound I could not possibly move away. Dark was rapidly descending. Any car coming down the road might crash into it. Lights had to be borrowed from neighbours, and this unholy mound of Kentish rag resembled a lighthouse on a sea-beaten coast.

I made my rock garden and planted it. I tended it with the wealth of pleasure it has ever given back to me. Little miniature plants began to thrive. Those that loved the sun I planted so that they should get the best of it. Those that like shade—such as the heavenly blue *Lithospermum prostratum* and the Ramondias, I put in half shade. I got some peat and mixed it heavily with the loam and planted my *Gentiana acaulis* where the wet would trickle down to them and keep them moist.

My rock garden thrived. It became a lovely sight in June, and went on with diminishing patches of colour through the Summer.

Then the ants descended upon it. I do not know where they 'came from. But they arrived; furniture, fittings and all!

Anyone who owns a rock garden has a disrespect for ants. A wholesome disrespect for ants. They arrived in my rock garden, in two camps, the black and yellow. They made air-raid shelters under the larger stones. They put their sentinels—according to the habit of the ant—at each entrance, as if to advise me that they had dug in. I almost expected them to put out a notice 'House Full'. Presently some of my best plants began to die. . . . I always found ants at the dead roots.

I started a campaign against these ants by pouring boiling water on their nests, killing a plant or two in the process. But the ants went on. They increased. They fought me. They gained ground as Spring followed Spring.

One day, in a mood of curiosity, I began to wonder what these ants thought they were doing. I could not conceive that they were merely trying to be a nuisance. So I had two boxes made, each two inches deep and about two feet long, with a sliding glass roof to each. I decided to inquire into this ant business.

On a Sunday afternoon I went down to my rock garden with these boxes. I took a nest of yellow ants—being careful to get the queen ant—and shuffled ants and a mass of the earth, which they were working in, into one of the boxes and closed the glass lid. I did the same with a nest of black ants. I took the cases into the house. How many thousands of ants I had in the cases I did not know. In each case was a heaving mass of ants and earth.

Next morning when I went down to my study to look at the ants, they had cut the main galleries through the earth which, I discovered afterwards, were to be their main streets for future thoroughfare. It was as if Regent Street had been opened up again after a volcanic eruption.

The ants must have worked all night. They were still working. There seemed to be no rest or time for meals. And I observed extreme order about their work. No ant carrying a knob of earth bumped into another ant. Major

ants hurried hither and thither, directing, watching, tapping with their antennæ a working ant on the head which was the obvious sign of an imparted message.

In two days each case of ants had made a complete nest with major roads and lanes branching sideways. I watched for them to put up the sign 'School'! Under the glass of each case was the complete picture of the normal life of the ant. In two days there was no longer that mad rushing about. The new 'city' was built complete after the earthquake.

I kept those two nests of ants in my study for six years.

They were a continual entertainment. No theatre in London ever put on such a marvellous performance. I used to get the cases out of the dark cupboard in which I kept them, for ants do not take naturally to light—and look down for hours on a city full of amazing life.

I fed the ants once a week by putting honey in a corner of the case. I put in water with a fountain-pen filler in the opposite corner. In hot weather—if they were not getting enough water—they would come up in little groups, queued up, no hustling, however frantic their thirst when the water was put in. Absolute order.

Through the process of years, certain ants died. Now and again one would quietly pass out. Other, and apparently well-informed ants, would come and examine it in its death throes, and, when the ant was going to die, they passed on, often running round the invalid, doing nothing.

But when the ant died there was a definite ceremony. Certain worker ants came and gathered up the body. There was usually a major ant in attendance, running round and fussing while the workers did the job.

They always removed a dead ant to a certain corner of the case as far removed from the food as they could take it. They put their dead out in a corner, an obscure corner to which other dead ants had been carried before. I almost expected them to raise up a gravestone of mould!

My ants settled down to their new life in the two cases. They had built their new cities, they belonged to them and they loved them; scoured them and kept them clean. They knew that manna from heaven, in the shape of food, came down to them on regular occasions. They knew when the glass top was moved, that water from some unknown heaven was going to flow in as from the brook Kerith. They *knew* that a movement of the glass slide meant goodness coming from someone who did begin to understand a bit of their lives.

They were orderly. They were tidy. There were no police-stops in their Piccadilly Circus, because the major ants hustled on the workers and they went right-left—without any coloured lights.

In this colony there were always worker ants at hand and in reserve. Sometimes when I brought the cases out of the cupboard, I shifted a piece of their dry mould, and it fell across their main street.

A worker ant—perhaps two—would rush immediately to this fall in their Regent Street. They were powerless to move the load. Another worker ant would come up. The original workers would tap him on the head with their antennæ. He would stop, and with them bite at the load and try to shift it out of the course of normal traffic.

They would fail, and they would wait. Another worker ant would come along. One would tap him with its antennæ. He would pause, look round, assure himself of the situation, as if to be quite certain that they were not putting an extra job on him. Then he and the three others would pull at that piece of earth, and shift it back to its proper position. Having done this, the two passing strangers would run up the road to their normal work and leave the original two to their job.

In the course of six years' observation I never saw an ant appeal to a fellow member of the colony, by a tap of the antennæ, and not receive help.

Those two nests of ants lived with me in my study, but I lost the whole of them one Winter through an epidemic, of what nature, I do not know. When you have fed and watered some creatures—they may be very inconsequent creatures, but believe me they are very important creatures in our study of Life—every Sunday for six years, studied them, became fond of them, their going is a loss.

I missed those ants. And even though I had studied their twin cities for six years, and saw the marvel of their work, I still do not know why they destroy the best plants in my rock garden. I do not begin to know. But I have had a wealth of enjoyment in trying to find out.

If you have studied ants as I have, you know that with boiling water you are trying to destroy a purpose of Creation. What purpose we do not know.

We are young, and we know so little about what happens in our gardens. With all our horticultural Science we do not begin to know.

So now I cope with my rock-garden ants in a different way. When I see the three sentinels near the hole their tribe has made under a stone, or near a plant, I apply the trowel. I remove the nest—or such of it as I can—and take it down to some friable earth at the foot of stones near the end of the rock garden where little grows. In a couple of days they have remade their city.

Two days ago I removed a nest in this fashion. This morning I went out to see what had happened. All was quiet on the ant front. They had fashioned their new city. They had settled in. There were a few workers running around like quick messengers as might happen if you shipped one West End hotel to another building in a night. Apart from these, there was no stir.

But three black ants ran up the flat face of the overhanging stone. They paused, as if looking at me. They may have been merely meditating. I do not think an ant, with its order, its discipline, its purpose, can think much

of a man anyway. But those three black ants stuck there in what they could get of the sun.

If they were talking about me—and they may have been, for they waved their antennæ wildly—I suppose they were saying this:

'You think you have been very clever in putting our nation in the shade. Under an old fir. Under a rotten stone where mildew comes from the fir. Where sunlight seldom penetrates. Very clever. But we'll be back in our old haunt next April.'

Knowing that an ant can travel thirty miles in a week, I won't argue with any ant. My rock garden is only twenty yards wide. They will make some marvellous house-flitting in a moonlight night next April. They will have settled in before I know they have done it.

I know they will. I'll find the little fellows under their same beloved stone which they chose originally.

They will be there all right!

I was walking in St. James's Park last Spring—a favourite haunt of mine, especially when the wild ducks have hatched out, and, in the first flush of youth, dash around their parents snapping at flies.

On this particular day I was standing beside a bed of irises in which a mother wild duck had made her nest. She was busy trampling down the irises around her nest because they hindered her way to and fro between the nest and the water. She was not interested in these irises. They meant nothing to her except the fulfilment of the mission for

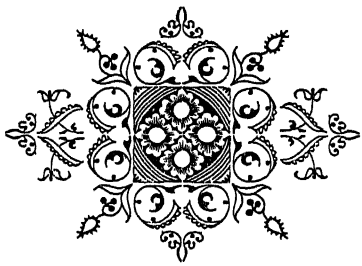
which she was born—motherhood. If a duck can look peeved, she did when she saw me watching her.

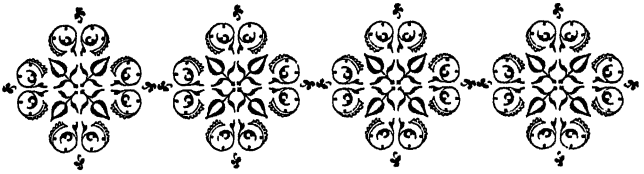
A workman and his wife were standing beside me looking at the destruction. We glanced at each other and laughed at the havoc.

Then the workman remarked to his wife:

'If that —— duck did that in our carrot-bed I'd wring its —— neck!'

He loved his garden, this fellow. He was just as keen on his job as the mother duck was on hers.





NIGHT VISITORS

WHEN I am working in my garden in the dusk of Summer evenings, the bats have a habit of swirling around like winged overseers. They take quick vision of what I am doing. They survey my neighbours engaged in the same toil. Then they pass on to somewhere and become lost in the growing dark.

We have many night-visitors in our garden. They mean little to us because we so seldom see them. But if I go down in the first burnish of Summer morn and look at the lawn, I see the tracks of creatures in the dew—creatures I do not know. When a January day is struggling into being I see the tracks of such creatures in the snow. They have come with the dark and gone with it to what mission I do not know. But they all have their jobs.

The bat that swings over my head like a piece of black velvet on wings, always interests me. It is a strange creature which belongs to the wing-handed family known as *Cheiroptera*. It has more power in its digits than any mammal of its size in the world. It is so acute in its sense of smell and hearing that—even if it had been born blind, which it wasn't—it could make its way quite easily through Life, and without collision or disturbance.

A few nights ago a small bat managed to get into this house somehow. She fixed herself firmly with her little gripping fingers into the net-work of the drawing-room curtains. There she was discovered in the morning looking

very out of place, as if she were a stowaway found hiding on the *Queen Mary*.

The entire household was required to see 'Miss Bat' after the Sabbath breakfast, and it was resolved to leave her in her position till dusk. She could then go away without charge for a day's residence.

Nightfall came, and 'Miss Bat' made no signs of departure. She had adopted us. So I took the family steps, carried them into the drawing-room, and very carefully tried to dislodge her to the sound of her protesting squeaks. For some time her small fingers defied me. They clung to the net-work of the curtain with the strength of bits of string.

At length I got her from her entanglement, and took her into the garden, and gave her hand-hold in the ivy on the house. She snuggled in among the branches as happy as a prude who had tumbled into a nudist party unawares, and now had escaped with some torn remnant of modesty.

An hour later I went out again to look at 'Miss Bat'. I found her snug-hole in the ivy, only to discover that she had truly flown. Whither had she gone? What was her programme for the night? Where was her home?

I do not know what the purpose of the bat is. Nor why she flashes about us like some detective of the dusk to see that we are working properly in our gardens. She does a bit of scavenging among our garden pests, but not a lot. She has given origin to two expressive phrases. 'As blind as a bat.' But she is only blind—or partially so—in sunlight. In the dark she has the keenest vision. She also coined that pretty phrase 'bats in the belfry' which we apply to people of doubtful intelligence. But there are no bats in her belfry. She is one of the most intelligent of the night visitors to our gardens.

I seldom see a hedgehog in my garden, but I know some of them visit me. I see their trail on the morning carpet of

dew on the grass. Thomas Hardy, in his poem *Afterwards*, writes of the nocturnal blackness:

'When the hedgehog travels furtively over the lawn.'

I know the hedgehogs visit me. I know that they come and go. I know they do some scavenging in my garden whilst I sleep. They devour the insects I do not want. Slow-moving as they are, they will catch the mice that will insist on making Bakerloo tunnels through my rock garden.

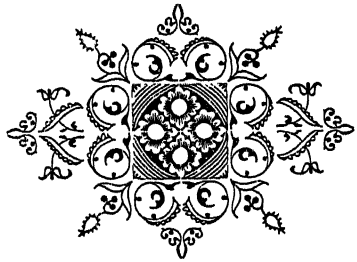
About August the hedgehog brings out the little family. Eight? Well, that is a full family. It usually consists of four. The sharp dark spikes on the backs of the parents are soft and downy in these young. As they grow up the first intelligence they derive is to prowl and hide. On discovery they become balls with a defence like a Maginot Line, only more effective. If you ever catch a hedgehog before it has coiled itself up at your approach, examine its mouth. Its teeth are arranged on exactly the same basis as yours.

If you have a hedgehog wandering about in your garden o' nights, you are fortunate. It works for you. Give it recognition of this fact by putting a saucer of water somewhere near the grass on the hot nights of August and September. I recognized the necessity of this when I found that a mother hedgehog and her four half-grown young had, in the heat of a September night, slipped into my little pool and drowned themselves whilst trying to drink. There were the corpses of five valiant garden servants waiting for me next morning.

These night visitors—they come in their tribes. There are dozens of them. I wonder what their keen eyes make

of our gardens in the dark? The moths of the dark—what wonder do they see in our gardens at night which we never see? How much do they know that we never know? And why do they come and go in their silent passage of the dark?

I suppose they all have their jobs.





CONVERSATION WITH MY DAHLIAS

SOME nights ago, I came home full of fatigue. Dragged up the road from the station, carrying my dispatch-case. Blazing Spring sunshine, the sky cloudless and blue, but this evening, Henley's late lark had forgotten somehow to sing in it for me.

When I got into my house I dropped into my armchair, well spent. Then, as I sat thinking, I remembered that the dahlias I had cut up were waiting to be put into the pot-holes already dug for them.

I felt too tired for dahlias tonight. But was I too tired for dahlias? If I did not see to them I was going to let them down, and they had never let me down.

So I went upstairs and shuffled into my old gardening clothes, and went down to the dahlias in the cool of the evening. There they were—little green plants, so carefully labelled. They all looked alike. Part of a species which was created only to show a pageant of beauty with the coming of Summer. As I looked at them they seemed like rows of little children.

They are always like that to me at the end of May. Children. They do not know the garden they are going to give me. But I do.

I dug up 'Pink Spiral', and took her down to her pot-hole. Then I brought down 'Australia' to be her mate. I planted 'Australia', and watered her in.

I considered my work; then I said to 'Australia'—'You've got to come out of this. "Pink Spiral" is a very

delicate lady. She is Georgian in her wonderful pink. Your blazing red and gold will overwhelm her. She'll hate you. She'll be unhappy with you all the Summer. She'll storm at you. She knows no manner of lip-stick or colour to keep up with you. You are strident and overbearing, so I'll tell you what I am going to do with you. I'm going to put you beside "Orange Boven". He's a brave-faced fellow of the family.'

I lifted 'Australia' out, and put her beside 'Orange Boven'.

'Now,' I said, 'I'll leave it to the pair of you to fight it out as to which is the more beautiful creation of your Maker. And if you dispute the matter, and refer it to Him, He will answer you in five words: "You are both my children".'

Then I brought 'Jane Cowl' down, and settled her into her pot-hole at the back of the bed for the tall lady she is. I followed her with 'Berengaria', and was about to plant her beside the glorious Jane, when Jane seemed to look at me with a wry face. Or, perhaps, it was that I looked at Jane with a wry face, for she was too young to foresee the coming trouble I saw.

I knew exactly what Jane would do when she grew up. She would argue with 'Berengaria' about her superior gold all the Summer. And 'Berengaria', being one of God's richest flowers, would give her some back-chat.

So I stopped all that. I put 'Black Jack' between them. Tonight they are three little plants—like children in a row.

I can tell you what is going to happen. Jane will become talkative when her glorious golden face first flushes to the sun. That is when Jane has grown up. She will become spiteful to 'Berengaria'—just two pot-holes away—when 'Berengaria' lifts her head of powdered gold. They will want to fight like film stars.

But old 'Black Jack', standing erect in his maroon majesty, will look—first right, then left. And he will say

to these two neighbours—'You are both fair women, and I hate your spite. You are like two fish-wives in the New Cut with your dirty tongues. Come closer, both of you. Come closer. Look at the sheen on my maroon petals. You've both been using peroxide. So look at me. It's common to be so nearly alike as you are. So look at me. I'm a dahlia!'

I went on planting out these children. I put 'Gaston Clement' at one end of the row and 'Red Champion' at the other, so that any rude passages from one to the other as to which had the more brilliant red should never be delivered. And I placed 'Phantom' between them. With her glorious purple and white she would tell the pair of them—if they lost their manners in abuse—to go away. She would explain briefly, and with the dignity of her difference, that, at no time, had she any use for red.

Now—two evenings later. I have finished planting out these children. I see their future, even before they see it themselves. When Summer comes, they will settle down into a wonderful family. I have planted them so that they shall not quarrel. They don't know how careful I have been about them, and their 'touchiness' as regards colour. No child knows how it will be brought up.

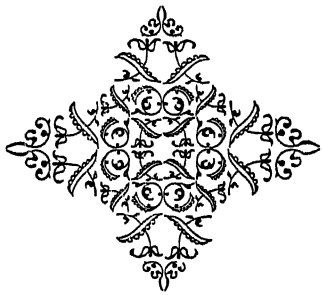
But, one day this Summer, 'Royal Velvet' will remark to 'Fleurop'—she's just a step aside—in so quiet a voice that only the passing breath of Summer will hear the remark and carry it away:

'That old Methuselah who planted us here knew something about us when we were very young, didn't he?'

'I suppose he did,' 'Fleurop' will answer, as she twists her lovely cornelian face a little to get the warmth of the sun more fully upon it. 'Yes, I suppose he did.'

Old 'Black Jack' in the back row will laugh. 'Jane Cowl' will look at him from one side, and 'Berengaria' will look sideways from the other to discover what he is laughing at. 'Black Jack' will go on laughing.

'I suppose he did,' 'Black Jack' will remark presently in his casual manner—in his droll casual manner. 'I suppose he did. But there is Somebody who knew far more than he! He wasn't self-taught!'





ANYBODY'S GARDEN

ONCE, when going down that long ribbon of a road which runs across Dorset from Shaftesbury to Weymouth, I saw on old man and his white-haired wife sitting on the grass bank and eating bread out of a piece of newspaper.

The old man told me that he was seventy-eight, and that his wife was a year younger. They had no home, no work, no prospect of work. They picked up a precarious living as they could. This was before the days of the dole. Usually they slept under hedges in Summer time. There were occasions in Autumn when they had to live on berries like the birds, for lack of food.

They were quite happy. It was a day of gruelling heat in early June. I discovered that, as man and wife, they had tramped the roads of England for years. They were too old now to be employed. Odd jobs—now here, now there—for a shilling or two was the most they could expect. But they were completely happy.

I noticed that the old woman had a big bunch of ragged-robins on her lap. I wondered what she was going to do with them.

The old man saw me looking at the bundle of flowers and presently he remarked:

'It's just that way wiv the missus. She likes flowers. Always did like flowers. Always picked wild flowers. We can't afford a garden! So she picks 'er flowers out of anybody's garden—the 'edges. We wus married wiv ragged-robins out of a Shropshire village. Nearly fifty

years ago. She carried a bunch of ragged-robins, and we've slept wiv our 'eads in 'em many a night o' late years. An' she must 'ave 'em fresh. She'll pick another bunch tomorrer, and carry 'em all day. Why she wants to plague 'erself carryin' 'em all day in this 'eat, I dunno.'

The old lady looked up at me and smiled. She said nothing, but went on eating her piece of bread. She glanced at her husband, then at me. I think she knew that I understood why she had picked that bundle of ragged-robins. Women ever remember, and men forget so soon. Presently she held up the bundle of pink flowers and said:

'From anybody's garden! An' I've never see'd a decent *made* garden that 'ad 'em!'

* * * *

I once knew a man who was blind, and so crippled that he had to be wheeled around in a chair. He was only about forty, but a motor accident had smashed him up and made havoc of his life. In spite of it all, he was still an ardent gardener.

Before the smash came that stole his sight and maimed his body, he used to work the full week-end on his suburban garden. It was quite a small plot. But because of the love and industry he gave to it, it was one of the most glorious little villa gardens in a London suburb.

With his sight gone and his body crippled, his garden became what one would expect—a weed patch. But ultimately it began to blaze again in its former glory.

One day I went to see him. It was late July and the garden was a storm of colour. He was sitting out in his wheeled chair at the edge of one of the borders.

We talked for a time. Then, very delicately, I put the question: 'Who does the garden now? It is as beautiful as ever.'

'I do,' he replied.

The answer puzzled me. I did not see how he could. Perhaps he realized by my pause that I did not understand, for presently he remarked:

'I get more out of my garden now than I ever did. I plan it in my mind—every bed and corner of it. Having made my plan, I give it to the gardener when he comes on Fridays. He does what I tell him to do. And he does not plant a seed or a bulb which I have not planned. I know, because I am aware of everything that is in this garden.'

'But you cannot see the result of your planning,' I suggested.

'I do. I see the whole thing in my mind as clearly as if my sight had been given back to me. I see colour mentally, and, by touch, know if the plants are doing well or otherwise.'

He leaned over in his chair, and felt with his long fingers around a group of plants which were a patch of red like a pool of blood. He ran his fingers over the flower-heads.

'These Sweet Williams have done well this year,' he said. 'I thought they would.' He bent lower and groped in the soil 'I thought they would. This is the soil to give the troops.'

He lay back in his chair then, and let the sun stream over his face.

'You know, a garden's a wonderful thing,' he said quietly. 'When I went blind, I thought I should go mad. I nearly did go mad. I felt, day by day, that I was going gradually mad. I wondered how long it would be before they shut me up in a "looney-house".

'Then the old garden re-hooked me. Could I go on with it? I began to imagine the garden again in my mind—to think about it. I found myself continually thinking about it. I began to plan it mentally.

'Presently I found that I could see colour mentally and plan colour. I visualized things coming up and flowering. I was able to plan next season before it came.

'I was being shaved by a barber one day when the full knowledge of the situation came to me. Like a flash of light. I could garden again! I could see it all afresh in my mind—probably better than most people do with their eyes . . . I began my gardening again. I began with a small patch. It worked. I went on with it. . . .

'My garden saved my reason. It saved my life. It gave me a new happiness. It drew me out of the Winter of Life to a Summer which I could not see but still could feel.'

* * * *

'Leaves must be green in Spring,' wrote Herman Melville in *Malvern Hall.* It is a common belief backed up by evidence.

I have a dwarf juniper tree in my rock garden. Its main branches died under the blasts of last Winter. I cut them off.

Spring came. But no life appeared on the little tree. I felt like digging it up and throwing it away. But in early Summer a freshet of green appeared. One small sprout. It made me wonder if trees have any sense of life. I think they have.

In the Park near my house, three beech trees have lived in close proximity for over two centuries. Last Summer the centre tree was stricken by lightning and died rapidly. But the companion trees escaped the slightest injury.

Nevertheless, those two trees quietly and slowly died during the months that followed. There was no reason whatever for their death.

The three trees had been together through the blastings of 200 Winters, and weaved their branches in a rich weft of affection through 200 Summers—possibly longer. The main companion is suddenly stricken down by an Act of God. And the other two die for no evidential reason. Why?

Do we know much about the trees in our gardens? Are we not many centuries too young? Will it not happen that those who come after us in the far-on years will find that a tree has an understanding which we, in these years, never knew?

Perhaps they have companionship like the other speechless things. Perhaps they have some sub-conscious knowledge of an Almighty Being who made them what they are. They may be sensitive to loss. We know too little now to argue about these things.

I might be less curious about it if I knew why those two beech trees died.

MY EARWIG TAKES A TOUR

In late Spring I was going away on a long journey in my car. I left the car beside a bank of rock-plants in my garden whilst I went into the house for my luggage.

I piled the luggage into the car. Then I walked round to see if the tyres were properly primed and that all was in order. Whilst doing so, I saw an earwig, that had come out of the bank, run up the off-side back wheel and disappear into somewhere near the hub.

I did not worry about him. He probably lived in luxury on my dahlias last Autumn, and if he wanted to commit suicide now, this was surely his own affair. I drove off and forgot about him. He was not on my visiting-list anyway.

I drove my car four hundred miles, after several stops. At length I pulled up at a house near Salisbury. Next morning I asked the chauffeur there to change my wheels. I wished the unused 'spare' tyre to be put on to the off-side back wheel. And a front tyre to be put on to the back to level the 'tread'.

He began his job. He removed the 'off-side' back wheel. I watched him.

He looked up at me presently and laughed.

'Here's a queer thing,' he said. 'I've never seen it before—An earwig! How did he get in here—and be still alive?'

I saw the wheel drawn off. I saw the earwig hustling

around, frightened, but in full possession of its thought and mind. It dropped presently to the cement floor of the garage and began to run away. The chauffeur was about to put his foot upon it, when I stopped him.

'Stop!' I exclaimed. 'Let him go. He is one of the most travelled earwigs that ever happened. He got into my wheel at Sevenoaks, Kent. I saw him do it. He went with me to Dorking, Surrey, where he had some rest whilst I went to Town for six hours. . . . I came back at night-fall, and drove him, twisting and turning, for over eighty miles to Winchester. I rested him there the night. And he must have been very giddy by then. . . .

'At ten the next morning I whirled him over and over whilst I went to Shaftesbury. He had a space wherein to try and think again whilst I ate the loveliest Dorset cheese. But at 2.30 I started him whirling once more as I drove on to Exeter. . . . It was getting dusk when I reached that city; and he must have had a bad headache all that night.

'I didn't know he was there when I drove out of Exeter the next morning at ten o'clock. I drove him, whirling over and over to Dorchester. I had a lunch whilst he had a sick headache. This had been a pretty bad tour for him. But I drove him this afternoon on to Salisbury.

'I suppose he thought he had come to some sort of a peace at last. But the next morning, like some violent Hitler, I jolted the car up again. I drove from Salisbury to Wimborne in Dorset every day—some fifty-two miles there and back—with this over-travelled insect revolving and revolving within my car. How he must have hated it . . . And now you want to kill this hero!'

As the wheel was drawn there he was! How many times his brain was flung round by every turn of the wheel—over eight hundred miles before we discovered him—you can work out for yourselves.

He dropped to the cement floor very happy. No giddiness, no acrimony. He began to run away with a brain as

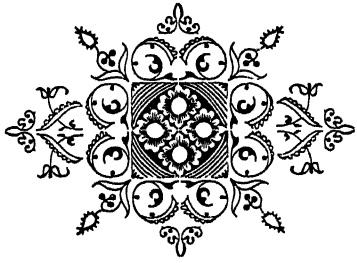
even, as undisturbed as it had been when he ran up my last dahlia stalk.

'Let him go,' I said to the chauffeur. 'He's been through Kent. A large portion of Surrey. Through a bit of Somerset. A large block of Devon. A spot of Hampshire and across Dorset. And now he's in Wilts! And I tell you. . . .'

The earwig scuttled into a bank of flowering periwinkles.

'And I tell you he's a sort of Columbus or Magellan. A brave fellow. He will tell all the earwigs what he's done, and they won't believe him. No. They will never believe him. He may write an earwig adventure book about it, they will never believe him.'

No one will ever believe him. Only I, who saw it happen.





THE GARDEN OF WHITE ROSES

ONCE I saw a man in Paris who had a little back-garden of rose-trees. He lived, and for aught I know still lives, in a little side-street between Montrouge and Gentilly. He was a man in the fifties—he might have been a little more. And he stooped.

He watched these rose-trees like children. He guarded them in Winter, steered them through the moods of Spring, and adored them in Summer.

He was a mysterious, happy sort of person. Very self-reserved. I did not know much about him. His neighbours said he was more than a little eccentric. They told me that he would go down to his rose-garden sometimes in moonlight in the blossoming-time of late June, and could be heard talking to these roses as if they were people. It was an odd fact that, when the rose-trees he loved gave back their friendship to him in flowering, they all bore white flowers. Not that this meant much to anyone, except for his lack of colour-taste in roses.

Two years later I learned the story of this man. The mystery, the wonderful heart of him which he kept clear from common reading, belonged to the secret purpose of his life.

He had money, but money never interested him. What interested him more was saving prostitutes from the Paris streets. He was unmarried. He spent his money in the

resurrection of these forgotten women of Paris who neither saw nor found Beauty in any garden, nor saw Beauty in the heart of any man, even if it had chanced to blossom there.

This man rescued women by a carefully contrived scheme. He was a familiar figure in Montmartre, and all the kindred haunts. He was good looking. He was intellectual. He had been blessed with an amazing personality. At the end of a few minutes' conversation with any woman she was interested in him. He possessed that deep passionate Life-sense—*verve*—the inexpressed but contagious desire to get all the best out of living.

His knowledge, his experience, and profound sense of friendship became clear to strangers, although friendship was a doubtful gift in the world in which he moved.

Sincerity is seldom an asset of dependence at a single meeting. It is the most suspected virtue in the world. But he drew these unknown women unto himself one by one. He took them to theatres and suppers. He drove them to their lodgements afterwards in taxis. Or he would go in and have a drink whilst the taxi waited, and then depart.

Then he secretly set to work to get these women into decent occupations one by one, as he met them and gained their confidence. So deftly did he contrive his work, that they did not know his aim. He was a gay raider of the night, who took his friendship, and forgot his claim.

By the power of persuasion, by the power of personality, he got these women into jobs. He paid for their employment on occasion. When some of them measured up his objective they revolted. They belonged to the first profession in the world, and he lost them. But he went on with the others.

How many of the street-women of Paris this man put back to decent living, I do not know. Nobody knows. And nobody will ever know.

But one thing I heard about him was this. He made

notes in an old pocket-book about every woman he had saved from the streets of Nowhere—women he had started again on a new and certain pattern of life. He told this to my friend who led me in a Summer night in Paris to overlook his garden.

I learned also that he would return on an evening of November dusk with a bundle of rose-trees and dig them in one by one. He had no gardener. He worked by himself. And those rose-trees always flowered white, in common with their companions, next June.

The reason was this: He bought a white rose-bush for every woman he drew from the brothels and put into a job, and he dug it into his garden before Winter came.

His neighbours said that he addressed these rose-bushes in the silence of evening as if they were people. They said he was mad—obviously quite mad. . . .

I wish I were as mad! And that I had earned that garden!

This is one of the secret gardens of which the World holds many. To these secret and sacred places there is always a story which the World does not know. Summer blazes on them. Winter hides some secret in its frozen encasement.

I can only offer one counterpart to this garden of White Roses. My War Garden. I have described it in a later chapter. There, the Dead of the Somme raise their heads again in poppies at Summertime, with wild antirrhinums and other flowers taken from the trenches where they died.

I think they would say—these Dead who yield the flowers each Summer in my War Garden, rich red and yellow from the Death-fields from whence they came—that the garden of White Roses in Paris is even a greater remembrance.

For the White Roses have made a garden of remembrance to living women—*women who were dead.*

Bernard Shaw wrote:

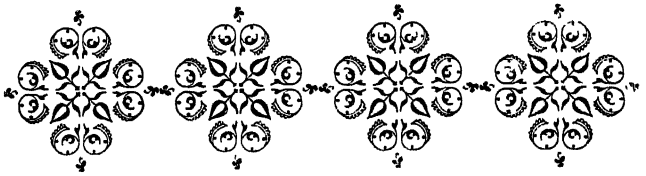
'The best place to seek God is in a garden. You can dig for Him there.'

But why should one dig for Him? Surely he pushes up enough evidence to save one the trouble of digging?

I was standing beside an old man, who was digging my plot, when a big lug-worm drew itself quickly out of the disturbed earth. It spread itself to great length, and covered the ground quickly in search of a 'better 'ole.'

The ancient gardener saw it, and laughed. Then he said:

'Funny things, worms! God put 'im in there, and now that 'e's done 'is bit, 'e's runnin' away from the applause!'



SOMETIME AT DAWN

THE last time I walked with Thomas Hardy in his garden was on a summer afternoon five months before his death. He told me that he had got up at four that morning in order to see an eclipse.

'I did not see the eclipse,' he said. 'There was too much cloud. But what interested me more—probably, far more—was my garden in sleep. It looked so different. I have seen it at dawn often before, and I must have seen many times what I saw this morning. But I had never been so impressed by the difference and beauty of my garden. It was like a lady in slumber—tired out and natural. And soon she was going to rise with the sun and put the paint on!'

I remembered what Thomas Hardy told me, and I have never ceased to profit by it. When he wrote in his poem 'Afterwards': 'He was a man who used to notice such things,' he surely wrote of himself.

Often had I seen my garden sometime at dawn. Through Youth and middle-age I had seen it. To me it held no mysteries in its silence and sleep, because, unlike Hardy, I did not 'notice these things'.

Some weeks after he made this remark to me I went into my garden at dawn. He had opened my eyes for me. With the coming of Autumn I saw the first frosts turn the Spider's-web in the ivy into the loveliest pattern of white. I wondered if the Spider thought he had achieved this pattern of art alone.

Winter closed down—the Winter Hardy died. It was a severe Winter. I saw on my windows the most amazing creations of ice-work beyond the imagination of any woman who made the best lace-work in any age. Not on a million windows would you see that same beauteous pattern repeated. The figurement departed during the day. The next night it came again in different fashion. More beautiful it seemed, and yet it could not be more beautiful than last night's pattern. Of course not. It had been changed to something equally marvellous by the fingers of the Great Artist.

When Spring came I went into the garden one morning and watched my flowers wake at dawn. The tulip petals had closed at dusk like hands lifted slowly in prayer. And now, as light grew in the sky, they came down again with the first blush of the sun; each in semblance of maidens who had been lightly kissed by a lover before the full passion of the day.

Weeks later I went into the garden sometime at dawn. I saw the red water-lily in my little pool unclose herself and lay out her beauty—blatantly naked—to the coming day. I saw my bulging Brompton Stocks raise their burdened bunches of blossom from the damp and dark, and fling the incense of rejoicing to the new day.

My garden borders in June are like the jewel-shops you pass in Bond Street. They are my jewel-shops. And sometimes at dawn I like to watch the shutters being taken down and the first darts of the sun light to brilliance the many facets of my jewels.

Had it not been for Thomas Hardy I might not have 'noticed these things'.



AN INTERVIEW WITH A COW

SOME years ago I lived near a man who had a small garden and an equally small paddock adjoining. The paddock measured about one-sixth of an acre, and he kept a Jersey cow in it. There was a shed at the end of the paddock for the cow's lodgement in Winter.

He was a quiet man. He seldom talked to anyone. He tended his garden with care and understanding, and produced a wonderful show in Summertime. He tended the cow with equal meticulous care. What his job in Life was I never knew. He went away somewhere early in the morning, and returned late in the evening, to work in his garden till light departed.

One Sunday morning, as I passed his house, I saw that the Jersey cow had broken down the flimsy fence that separated the paddock from his garden. Virtually she had taken possession of his garden. As her owner could not afford a mower for his bit of grass, the invitation of this grass was too irresistible for any cow. She broke all boundary laws and just strolled in.

Now, as I looked over the owner's gate, I saw the cow lying quietly down chewing the cud. She had fed well. That her hinder quarters lay asprawl over an aster-bed did not matter to her at all.

The owner saw me, and strolled down the short gravel path.

'She's made a bit of a mess of your aster-bed!' I remarked, condolingly.

'Yes. Ostrich plumes, they were. But I don't care!' he answered.

This struck me as an odd remark from one who loved his garden. I did not answer him. We stood looking at the old Jersey chewing the cud.

'I wonder what cows think about when they are chewing the cud?' I remarked presently, an absurd remark made in order to end the silence between us.

To my surprise he answered: 'Buttercups and babies! The present and the future. They save babies—cows do'.

'I wouldn't bank entirely on your philosophy,' I said. 'Of course a cow must think about something when it lies around for hours and goes on chewing. A man will chew gum for hours. He'll tell you it helps him to think. Not being a chewer, I don't know. But a cow—staring at space—'

'Oh, it thinks all right. Thinks all the time,' he answered me.

'You believe that?'

'Well, anybody would—who knows a cow.'

'Your Jersey thinks she's on velvet—which, in the cow language, means the best spot of grass near her . . . She's mucked up your asters properly. Come on . . . I'll help you drive her out. And I'll help you to mend the fence.'

'Let her be,' he retorted.

'Let her be! She'll be across your bed of stocks when she's finished this cud business,' I explained.

'Well, let her . . . That cow saved my baby's life last March. The doctor said the baby couldn't live. The cow beat the doctor. Her milk beat his physic . . . You can hear the baby indoors now. Hark a minute . . .!'

We ceased to talk. We heard the baby all right . . . He pointed to the Jersey cow.

'She did it. I believe she *knows* she did.' He dropped his voice. 'But you wouldn't understand,' he added to himself.

'I think I might,' I said.

'Well, when you've been a sort of pal to an animal—somehow you both get to understand. You don't know how, because there ain't no communication, no talk between you. It's something—I don't know what. I suppose it comes out of something which you can't read about because there ain't nothin' to read. But the old Jersey saved my baby. I bet she knows it. There ain't much cows don't know. When they chew the cud they think . . . Pity more people don't chew the cud.'

We stood watching the lovely beast in her happiness. Chewing . . . chewing . . . Looking at nothing . . .

'Well, what's she thinking about now?' I asked presently.

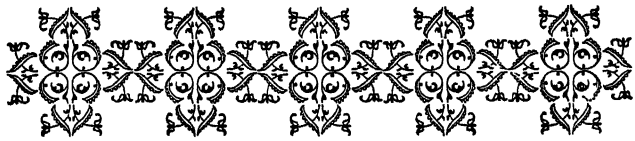
He glanced at me.

'Same old thing. Buttercups and babies!'

I think that, out of the gratitude of his heart, the fellow believed it.

'Courage is the most common and vulgar of all virtues,' wrote Herman Melville.

But watch a dandelion plant, mown down any Saturday on any lawn in Summer. It will still spring its flower when Summer has lost heart with your garden . . . Would you call that courage vulgar?



ANY CHILD IN ANY GARDEN

THE First Garden knew nothing of children. It may have been—and probably was—the most beautiful Garden the world has ever known, because it was intended so to be.

But the laughter of a child never rang through its trees nor did a child, worn out with play, sleep beneath the coolth of those trees. And yet in any modern garden the most beautiful thing is a child at play. It may be that the Maker of the First Garden forgave the Sin, and put back into anybody's garden this eternal sign of forgiveness.

Whenever I see a child playing in a garden—be it a garden of riches, or in the small space of a workman's 'cat-run', I think that way. I may be all wrong. But I cannot but analyse the thought that any child in any garden is always happy. Why? A child may be difficult about its meals, even when it is hungry. It will quarrel at the thought of going to bed. Two processes necessary for its habit; its comfort. But one seldom finds a child unhappy in a garden, even if that garden does not contain two blades of grass.

Any garden to any child is the benign gift of Happiness. What, in consequence, is the smallest patch of garden to any child? *The World.*

No one understood the mind of a child better than R. L. Stevenson, who had no children. Only a step-son, whom he adored, and to whose childhood he gave his

thoughts. Recall Stevenson's remark about a child in a garden:

'This was a world, and I was king,
For me the bees came by to sing
For me the swallows flew.'

In passing through life you will have observed that when a child grows up, it seldom forgets the garden in which it played in Youth. The child, rising to manhood, will forget many of the episodes of Youth. The mind, like some skilful sub-editor, blue-pencils out what it is unnecessary to record.

I once knew a man who came out of the direst poverty, but lived to make over half a million pounds. He never cared much about those pounds. They had brought him no extra happiness in their coming. The mathematical mind of the man was like some wild dog on a chain which dragged him along to a fortune. And the further it dragged him, the better he knew that he was leaving something better behind him.

We sat at lunch one day, and the run of conversation led us to talk about our youth. He was three years older than I, but our thoughts lay along the same trail.

He had been born to dire poverty in the East End of London. He had made his way to a fortune by the dexterity of his own wits. But he told me that he had never been happier than when he had played in his back-yard with a box of soldiers, hiding each soldier behind one of the few blades of grass that existed there.

'That was a garden,' he finished. 'And now that I have a large garden I don't understand it. I did that one. I don't know one plant from another in my present garden. . . . But I *did* understand those bits of grass!'

No child cares much for the flowers in its garden. Pink or blue it knows them not. It is the grass it loves. And the long explanations to the gardener as to how to do his

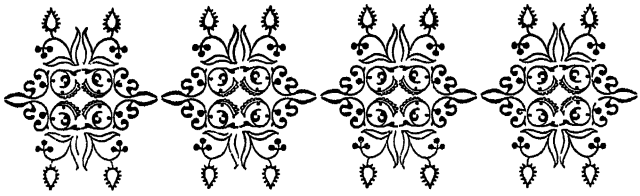
job. . . . Examining a bit of garden machinery which seems so mysterious and magical that he must understand its working . . . sowing seeds which, if they don't come up and weeds do, there is something he was responsible for . . . watching the cutting down of a tree—a mighty task like sawing down St. Paul's Cathedral . . . finding a nest of young birds in the garden hedge, and discovering that he must be silent about them or they will be deserted . . . going down and peering quietly into the nest every morning to be sure they are still there because he hasn't told anybody. . . .

That place of mystical happiness—any garden to any child! He may grow up and hate gardens. He may grow up and become a slave to one. But the garden of remembrance was probably a patch in a garden small or very large which he did not understand.

The later years break in. The World hits this child of the garden. Come Fortune. Come pain and struggle, the days in the first garden are not forgotten.

Possibly this happiness of any child in any garden has some connection with the First Garden. I don't know Possibly some little ghost was about to enter its gate, but the gate slammed and it was kept out.

But in later years this was remembered.



THE PECULIAR ADVENTURE OF MY PEACOCK

I WAS pushed into this peacock business by a friend. He told me that I ought to have a peacock and a peahen in my garden.

Seeing that my garden is under three acres, and that I have neighbours who might not agree with the peacock when, from the end of April until July, he praised his Maker according to its lights—which might not be the lights of my neighbours—this was a reckless adventure on my part. But I undertook it blindly. Very blindly.

And it started badly. I failed to notify my household that I had bought a pair of pea-fowl. My wife was away. Had she not been away she would have grappled with the situation. For, in my ardour for birds and animals, I had recently bought a pair of flamingoes for the pond I had dug through many months—in order to get exercise at the weekends. I had golden pheasants and other birds, and she knew I was searching for a pair of penguins for the pond. Also she knew that, a few weeks before, I had been on the point of buying a young wart-hog till, over the fish at dinner one night, she firmly put her foot down on any adventure with wart-hogs. She knew that my friend, Seton Gordon, the naturalist, had caused to be sent to me, too, from the island of Skye, some sea-gulls' eggs at my request. I had a hope that I could hatch

them out. So I put the eggs under two hens and left them to it.

When these young gulls were to be hatched out, I thought I could feed them on minced fish. However, I wanted to be sure that this was the correct food, so I wrote to Seton Gordon, who was my Naturalists' Encyclopædia. He replied—I cannot remember his exact words—that the gull regurgitated the food for its young, and was I prepared to do the same?

By the grace of God none of those gulls' eggs hatched out. After sitting well over a month, the two hens walked off the eggs, cocked an eye at each other as much as to say: 'Huh! any trick on any hen!' and duly pursued the ordinary life of any normal fowl.

To revert to this peacock business. The first intimation I received of the arrival of the birds was a telephone call to my office from the cook who said that two peacocks (?) had arrived, and what was to be done with them. I told her to get the two garden men to let them out in the orchard.

Those brave fellows were not accustomed to the ways of the peacock. In short, they were not interested in peacocks. The male bird was in full plumage—for this was May—and his tail was tied to a running-board attached to the box in which he had travelled from Somerset.

Therefore, the first thing they did was to open the *front* of the box, without untying the bird's tail. The peacock made a dive for freedom—and left the whole of his tail fixed to the running-board. For the remainder of the summer he crept about tailless and in shame.

I named the peacock Aubrey, after the friend who had pushed me into this affair. In a short time Aubrey and his

wife settled down and became beautiful natives of my garden.

Now the peacock is one of the most suspicious of birds. Its throaty 'Ock! Ock!' when you approach is not fear, but suspicion. I determined that I would remove suspicion of me from that bird, and it took me an age to do it. I discovered by long experiment that my chief appeal to him was a currant bun. After many months of Sundays sitting on the garden step, he approached me with the familiar 'Ock! Ock!', looked at the bun, saw the currants in it, twisted his head this way and that, approached stealthily, stopped. Another 'Ock! Ock!' Another two steps forward. He reached the bun, picked out the currants, and turned away.

After that he seemed to realise that he had become a member of the family. He fed from my hand, and walked into the kitchen with an announcing 'Ock! Ock!' in search of the better things of peacock life.

The second year his wife laid two eggs, and hatched a fine brace of chicks. We made frantic efforts to raise these chicks, hunting in the rock-garden for fresh ants-eggs, and so forth. But when a rain-storm came the chicks wilted under the damp, dropped their little copper under-wings and died. This happened four years in succession.

In the fifth year of Aubrey's habitage with us we thought we had at last reared one chick. He was now many weeks old, a fat little *poussin*. He was full of life, hunted and grubbed for himself, and strutted abroad in the rose-garden with uplifted head in adolescent manner. Aubrey the second appeared to be the definite successor to one of loveliest peacocks I ever knew.

One Sunday afternoon in Summer Ernest Raymond, the novelist, was sitting in my garden. He had just written a new novel *A Family That Was*, and we were talking about it.

Suddenly my wife came quickly across the lawn. The

worst had happened. The peachick had been climbing among seed and other boxes in the shed, overturned one of the heaviest and thereby killed itself.

'There,' said Ernest, 'is a family that was!'

I have wished you to meet Aubrey so that you may know the manner of bird he was. I will now relate his peculiar adventure in which he held up the town fire-brigade.

That same year I went fishing some sixteen miles away on a September Saturday. My gardener came with the car to take me home at sunset. When we arrived home, and he had garaged the car, he went off to drive Aubrey into his house for the night. He flicked a newspaper at him violently to hurry him up. Aubrey then took wing like a pheasant, sailed over the garden, over the house and pitched in a garden across the road where he was attacked by a terrier.

This was not the treatment to which he was accustomed. He took refuge in a tree close to my neighbour's bedroom window, and in that tree he gave five shrieks every few minutes throughout the night.

No one slept in that house that night. My man went over next morning to try to get the bird out of the tree, and failed utterly. At noon my neighbour rang me up to know what I was going to do about this peacock business. No one had slept in the house during the night. This could not go on.

Definitely it could not go on. I went over to the garden. Aubrey had now perched himself on the top of one of those fir trees which have no branches, but a blob of greenery at the top, and Aubrey was on this greenery. I gathered that he was pretty well a hundred feet from the ground. I saw him up there, peering down, quiet, unhappy in his new sphere, but inquisitive as to what diabolical happenings were being prepared below.

'Well, what are you going to do about it?' my neighbour asked angrily.

'What does one do with a peacock about a hundred feet up in a tree?' I responded, pointing at Aubrey.

'You've got to do something, and pretty soon.'

'I see that. I will get my shot gun, draw the shot, and fire a couple of barrels under the tree. That may make him leave the tree.'

My neighbour grunted. He thought it a comic solution as, indeed, it proved to be. I got my gun. I drew the shot from a couple of cartridges and fired two barrels beneath the tree. Aubrey merely looked down. Not even peeved. A frantic woman appeared in a few minutes from the next garden and said I had awakened her baby! That was the only effect of the great offensive!

'Well, what do you think you're going to do now?' said the garden-owner sarcastically.

'There are only two courses,' I said. 'One, to shoot the peacock, which I refuse to do, not only because it is a friend of the family, but because it is a finer specimen than any in the Zoo. The second is to send for the Fire Brigade.'

'Then send for the Fire Brigade,' he snorted. 'We can't have any more of this.'

So I telephoned for the Fire Brigade. In due course it arrived. The captain and his men waded through this miniature entangled forest. He looked at the tree. He looked at Aubrey.

'No trouble about this,' he said. 'One of my men is an old sailor. He'll climb that tree and get the peacock out of it. Funny thing,' he laughed, 'last March we had to come to your house on a Sunday because your garage was burning. Now we have to come on a Sunday to get your peacock out of somebody's tree!'

'One up on me,' I said.

The old-time sailor started to climb the tree. It took

him an hour before he got his hand on Aubrey's tail. Meanwhile Aubrey had been very disinterested in the whole business. But when a hand touched his new tail, sprouting after the Summer moult, he gave a vicious kick, flew to a worse position in the wood, and left his tail feathers in the sailor's hands.

Trouble was brewing rapidly. My neighbour cursed peacocks, and those who kept them, to high heaven.

Firemen then went up the road, and attached the hose to the main. The hose lay across the road. They had hardly done so when a young 'blood' with his best girl came up the road in a 'two-seater', drove over the hose and cut it. A fountain sprang up. Meanwhile masses of people had gathered in the road, asking 'Where is the fire?'

When I replied that there was no fire, but merely a peacock, they were quite certain I was an imbecile.

Presently, while the firemen were struggling to get the hose through the wood, and shape it on to Aubrey, the young 'blood' in the car came back again. He was very angry. The water had been flying from the main up the road.

'Where's all this water coming from?' he demanded viciously. 'Just look at the mess on my car!'

'I am very glad to see you back,' I told him. 'You cut the Town hose when you wilfully drove over it a few minutes ago. And I'm glad to have your number.'

Meanwhile the Town Fire Brigade had got the hose directly on to Aubrey on his bit of tree. And, old warrior that he was, he stood up to it. He truly stood up to it. His tail hung down like a bit of string under the cascade of water. He stood up against the full force of that Fire Brigade.

But when they began to knock his feathers out I stopped the performance. I was angry. This was flaying a family friend. I sent the Fire Brigade home, and left Aubrey on his tree.

'And what sort of a night do you think we're going to have tonight?' exclaimed my neighbour angrily.

'Peace,' I said.

'Well, if we have another night like last night—'

'You wait.'

I knew Aubrey. He was unhappy up on that fir tree with the hose let loose against him. This wasn't his habitat. I knew he'd come home. At 5.30 the next morning I heard his wings flutter heavily into the cedar tree outside my bedroom window. Aubrey had come home.

His afternoon out cost me £5 for the Fire Brigade, and the blonde youth—who cut the hose—had to pay over £5 for doing it!

It was an expensive Sunday afternoon. The only thing I regret is that, for all this money, Aubrey did not get more fun out of it.

WILLIAM BLAKE wrote:

'To create a little flower is the labour of ages.'

But, to us who 'garden', the labour of ages is worth while if it brings to blossoming that little flower.

THE GARDENS OF THE POOR

THE Rich admire flowers; the Poor adore them.

There are, of course, many exceptions. But, in passing through life, I have noticed that the Poor usually get more joy out of flowers than the Rich.

Ruskin wrote:

'Flowers seem intended for the solace of ordinary humanity; children love them; quiet, tender, contented ordinary people love them as they grow, luxurious and disorderly people rejoice in them gathered. They are the cottager's treasure; and in the crowded town, make, as with a little broken fragment of rainbow, the windows of the workers in whose heart rests the covenant of peace'

If you travel into London—or other large cities—by any railway you pass the gardens of the poor. Often they are no bigger than cat-runs, but they are the beloved gardens of the poor. Many are gay with a wild conglomeration of flowers. But the owners think more of them probably, and see more colour and richness there, than if they walked among the dahlias in Hyde Park.

Some of these houses whose backs you stare out upon as the train hurries you through the city's environs have no garden at all. Not an inch of free ground. But examine those houses as you pass.

You will see a window-box here, a patch of colour in contrast to the ageing wall about it. That is somebody's garden. The glory of the Public Gardens does not compare in the mind of somebody with this little patch perched in a window.

A window-box in blossom will give that worker-owner more joy than if he had planted the whole of Hyde Park and watched it grow.

The love of the Poor for flowers is one of the simple beautiful things which crowded places of civilization cannot destroy. The thatched cottage of the country may have a garden ablaze with flowers. But it is in the small patch at the back of a little aged house somewhere in a city slum which, bright now with flowers through the work of an over-worked man, reveals the heart of the owner—the heritage of instinct from his forebear who worked in the First Garden.

Some time ago a man, who wheeled a coster barrow about the streets, was brought up before the magistrate for stealing a bunch of wallflower plants from a shop where masses of plants were on sale beside the pavement. He took these stolen wallflowers home and planted them in his garden—a window-box.

He was very frank with the magistrate. He said: 'Yes, I stole those wallflowers, and I planted my window-box with 'em. That's the only garden I've got. I'm very fond of flowers, my lud, but things are a bit of a struggle. Yes, I stole 'em all right. But flowers aren't the common property of the rich, are they, Sir?'

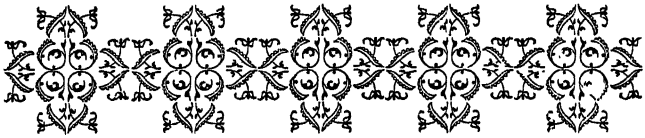
What the magistrate replied to this trite remark—and it required some answering—I do not know. I do not remember if he fined the coster who stole the plants.

But one thing I do remember about this case. As the coster passed out of the court a stranger came up to him at the door and slipped a pound note into his hand. And he said this:

'Here's a quid to buy you some tulips for that window-box for next Spring, and you'll be able to buy some Summer plants out of the change. You have as much right as any one of us to a bit of garden. All of us were first born in a Garden. All the damn-lot of us!'

These gardens of the Poor! You see them as you pass I look at them, and enjoy them as the train carries me swiftly beyond. Hollyhocks with their uprising pink and ruddy heads. Low beds of nasturtiums. Dahlias of uncertain breed sprawling or neatly tied up. Or a massed bed of flowers—all kinds bunched together—which reveals that the gardener knows nothing about gardening, but he loves his flowers.

Little Edens, these places. And the flowering window-box the same. Somebody's little Eden. And that's where we began.



WEEDS

We who 'garden' stoop and sweat through long hours tearing the weeds from our patch.

In the fullness of Summer we go for a holiday, probably to some wild place of Nature where, on the hills and the untilled ground, weeds make a carpet of colour.

Then we lie among weeds, and revel in the splendour of their pattern. We picnic among weeds. We revel in the wild scent of them. We go back to Nature—to weeds. Vast spaces of weeds, flowering and spreading riotously in their fashion.

But imagine any hill, any field of Summer, or the long stretches of the country-side without its weeds. Imagine these places as plain earth and grass. No colour. No insects, no butterflies searching the flowering weeds according to their mood.

Plain grass. Plain earth.

The greatest gift ever given to the country-side was weeds. If, at some Supreme command, all weeds were stopped from flowering, the country beauty of any Summer would be spoiled in a night.

We return from holiday refreshed and strengthened. Rest, the open air, the scent of a million weeds has made us whole.

So, with a new zest, we set out on a new campaign of tearing the weeds from our gardens.

Just one of Life's ironies.

MY WAR GARDEN

In a little quiet corner I have a beautiful patch of wild flowers in Summer. A blaze of wild poppies. Some lanky blue chicories. Little scarlet-eyed flowers like the Scarlet Pimpernel. The wild dwarf yellow antirrhinum.

People who come in to see my garden ask me what this patch of wild flowers means. I tell them that it is my War Garden. At first, they do not understand.

The small patch of wild beauty began in this manner. When the 1914–1918 war ended, I decided that I would make a patch of remembrance in flowers—flowers that would go on and on, as one Summer succeeded another—to those who died that we should retain our gardens in our own keeping.

In the Autumn of 1919 I went out to the battlefields to gather seeds before the trenches had been filled in, or the work of reconstruction begun.

The trenches on the Somme lay undisturbed. All they had done so far was to blow up ammunition dumps. The explosions were going on all day.

I found the stricken battlefields of the years before coloured with flowers. It was September, and some of the seed pods were ready.

I gathered a large packet of poppy seed from the trenches of the Somme—from the historic battlefields of La Boiselle and Pozieres. In Fricourt I found some poppies that had grown round a patch of bandages stained russet now with blood, and I carefully took their seed.

In what remained of Delville Wood I found these lanky blue chicory flowers. In spite of the havoc of four years, their roots had come to life again. They had flowered as they were wont to do before the blast of shell-fire lay its poison upon the Earth.

I passed on to Vimy Ridge, and there in the untouched trenches the wild antirrhinum was flowering as if in rejoicing that War had departed. Beneath the close trampling of men's feet on every inch of the Ridge their roots had still survived. Shells had flung these roots this way and that, but they still survived. They lived and blossomed in their season. Now, in the Autumn of 1919, they were heads of clustering seed where they bloomed their pageant of remembrance.

Very carefully I gathered these seeds, labelled them, and brought them home. I would make a War Garden. But I had no chalk, and these Somme poppies and wild antirrhinums needed chalk. I went ten miles for a load of chalk, and mixed it with my rich Kentish loam.

Having prepared the ground I sowed my War seeds in the Spring of 1920. A blaze of blossoms came to me with the warming of Summer. They had responded to the chalk and the sun. They had responded to my efforts. And every Summer they blaze again in remembrance.

This Summer the flame of Somme poppies in this little patch has been more wonderful than ever. I keep the patch very carefully weeded so that no vagrant wild flowers shall come in and assume a glory they have never earned. I take the poppy seed each year at the end of the Summer and sow it again in the patch at Springtime, lest the old parent poppies should not have cast the ground as heavily as I would like with their seed. I am not taking any chances of this War Garden dying out. And every poppy—every flower—in it drew its ancestry from the trenches.

There may be other War Gardens in Britain. But, if

there are, they are probably few. Some years ago an article appeared in a national newspaper on my War Garden, and I was inundated with requests for seeds. I sent little packets of seeds away to those who lost relatives on the Somme—even so far away as New Zealand. And probably they have made little gardens of remembrance by now.

My War Garden is a pageant of scarlet and blue as I write, with the Vimy Ridge yellow antirrhinums as an undergrowth, and the scarlet-eyed creeping flowers from Trones Wood, and a great flood of red Somme poppies sweeping over the whole. In their beauty and solitude of their blossoming I write these four lines to them :

> Cool in the corner, sunshine and rain,
> Blazed in the noon-tide, redness and pain—
> A pain of red poppies, a grief in the grass—
> A mutter of voices that whisper and pass.

I once knew two men who, living in semi-detached villas, hated each other. That is a strong assertion, but true. They hated each other. A wooden fence divided their two gardens.

They both worked hard in their little plots when they returned from the City. They scowled across the wooden fence. They spoke over the fence about twice a year, and it was usually about the lack of rain or the deluge of it. The other always answered with the same words: 'Yes, you're right', and went on with his mowing. They were like a pair of Siamese twins held together in hatred by the bond of a semi-detached house.

One of these men produced a mighty vegetable marrow in Autumn. It was a long green giant. He was violently excited because he believed he had produced that marrow by an experiment. He propped it on the dividing fence, and showed it to his neighbour.

'I fed that marrow plant on port wine and look what it's produced!' he exclaimed.

The neighbour looked at the marrow. He looked at the man who held it and believed in his heart that he lied.

'Port wine?' He pinched the marrow lying on the woodwork. 'I suppose you mean that you blew it out with your bicycle pump!'

'No', the other explained seriously. 'I fed the plant. I ——'

The man next door went on with his mowing. But, when his mowing was done, the mower went round to the house next door. He had seen this great marrow. It was a mighty effort. And he felt it was only neighbourly to do something about it.

That evening those two neighbours were sitting together in the garden of the owner of the marrow. The marrow lay on a trestle table like an ancient god for worship. It had brought together two warring factions. A bottle of port had been opened—and three glasses, for the wife of the marrow-feeder was there—were half filled. Yes, and they were smoking cigars!

At first I thought the episode strange. But now I know that it was not strange.

Neighbours may hate each other. But if they work in their gardens they become a League of Neighbours. It may take time. There is no record that Eden was ever divided by a garden fence.

OUR SCAVENGERS

STARLINGS haunt my house. Before the days of food restrictions I fed them with lumps of fat to keep them here. I ought to be had up under the Bribery Act!

But they are adorable birds. I like to see them strutting the lawn in November when all the Summer birds have gone, which signifies that they have no further use for me till next year.

Summer has gone; its birds of passage have gone: But many starlings stay on. The starling is faithful. It is a neighbourly bird, and, if you study it at close quarters, is very beautiful. It loves human habitation. It fouls our chimneys in its affection, but it adores mankind.

One May a tragedy happened here. We had bought some old table glass at a sale. We had ranged it out on the window-sill of the spare bedroom for the time being. The next morning I heard an awful crashing in that bedroom. It sounded as if someone with a stick was pounding the precious glass to pieces.

I hurried into the room. There was a starling that had been busy building a nest in the chimney. It was like an explorer who sets out for the North Pole, and tumbles somewhere into an unknown Southern Region. It had come down too far. In the room it had become frightened and lost, and flew desperately at the window, smashing old glass at every effort. I suppose the bird cost me some pounds in breakages every time it flew at that window.

The wretched bird had been cut by the broken glass. I opened the window and let it out. And it went away with a glad cry: 'Sorry you've been t-r-r-oubled!'

At this time we were about to have the outside of the house painted. I wandered into the garden to see the head painter. I told him that I did not want the starlings' nests in the eaves to be disturbed. I knew there were three.

'Not take the nests out?' he said. 'Then there are certain places we cannot paint.'

I explained to him that if the nests were disturbed the birds might desert the house. And they had been here for years, and I wanted them here. I did not wish the nests to be touched.

He looked at me in a way which said more plainly than words, 'This fellow's mad'. Then he said: 'You'll have a pie-bald house'.

We may have a pie-bald house. I don't notice it, and nobody has remarked upon it. But those three nests that made us pie-bald flung—in the fullness of time—a fresh and assaulting crowd upon my two cherry-trees.

Some of us who 'garden' do not value the starling. He is a bold fellow who likes fruit. That is considered to be his vice. But he is the best scavenger we get in our gardens. He eats his own weight in blight and worms which havoc our lawns, in four days. He is a minor flunkey cleaning up our outer habitation. And he has a passion for Allington Pippin apples. He may foul our chimney with his nest, and the chimney-sweep may endeavour to poke him out.

But leave him alone. He is an unpaid servant who has no use for the trade union limitation of ten hours a day. He gets on with his job.

If you live in London you can see at dusk a wonderful sight. Go to the National Gallery, or St. Paul's, or to the

trees in Savoy Hill in November. Stop and watch the antics of the mass of starlings in either place.

They are all crowding in to roost for the night. Hundreds of them. Thousands of them. Some may have come from near-by gardens. Yours, perhaps, or mine.

But there they are, shuffling along the ledges of these famous buildings, or in the ancient trees. Talking? Not one of them ceases to talk until night comes down.

I don't know what they are talking about. They are not quarrelling. There is no argument such as might occur if somebody had purloined a seat which was reserved in a railway carriage. They are quite friendly.

Stand and watch them. No, don't hurry away. A fresh starling arrives on the ledge. Instead of being fussed and peeved because of the arrival of a starling with whom the other birds on the ledge have not yet exchanged visiting-cards, this packed row of starlings lets the newcomer in. The row is crowded already. But when the newcomer perches, the starling on the right will push its neighbour a bit more to the right. The starling on the left will push its neighbour a bit more to the left. The newcomer gets its perch for the night. And probably it has never met its neighbour before.

Some of these starlings have been cleaning up the King's garden at Buckingham Palace all day. Some of them have been cleaning up cat-runs at the back of humble hovels. But there is no distinction. They all settle down and go on talking. They can't stop talking.

I was speaking to a famous naturalist one day about this November evensong of the London starlings. He said this:

'Half of them are little Hitlers.'

I said: 'What do you mean—"little Hitlers"?'

He said: 'Half those starlings are Germanic, and will go back to Germany, and come back here to breed.'

Well, I do not know which of the starlings I watch in the dim November evenings are little Hitlers. They carry no swastika and need no passport. They have the same lovely points of carmine and gold colouring the black when they come down to feed. They work, they scavenge. They are walking dust-bins who carry away the nuisances in our gardens.

Like all servants, they need payment. The *valuta* does not count for much in the starling nation. They like cherries. Perhaps the labourers will take payment for their toil in strawberries. Or, if you do not grow these fruits, they will be more than adequately paid by the ripe Allington Pippins from your only tree in October. Or, if you have never grown an Allington Pippin in your life, they will be satisfied with the worms on your November lawn. Just as a Continental servant will be satisfied with 10 per cent of your bill if he discovers that you are really too poor to give him what he thinks he ought to have.

If you are mean, and grow these fruits and buy close nets to keep out the birds who have scavengered for you, they are too dignified to apply sanctions. They will still strut your lawn in a November clearing up. They will still rear their young in the old chimney, for they belong to your garden. They are part of your family—but you may have forgotten it. *They are part of yourselves.*

Before the B.B.C. built itself a palatial palace in Portland Place with its Eric Gill sculptures, it had more humble premises on Savoy Hill. I had occasion to go down there one November evening. The starlings were talking loudly in the trees. I said to an official at the B.B.C.: 'What a row those starlings make. I wonder the sound does not come into your broadcasting.'

He said: 'We are going to broadcast the chattering

of those starlings next week, and ask the public to tell us what it thinks the noise is.'

They duly broadcast the chattering of those starlings, and asked the public to explain the noise.

A week later I was at the B.B.C. again. I asked the same official how they got on about the starlings.

He said: 'Well, we broadcasted their chattering and asked listeners to tell us what the noise was. Eighty per cent of the replies we received said it was the sound of motor-brakes suddenly applied!'

This seemed to me like a scandal in a ducal family. Motor-brakes! I have a starling that sits on my eave and talks to me in a language which I know must be Mongolian, or something similar, on a June morning! But it has the definite process of talking. A weird little chatter goes up and down in ecstasy to the Sun, with long extended sounds. And the hurried chatter of these birds settling in for the night in Winter. These birds pushing this way and that to make way for a newcomer. An unknown newcomer. Without quarrel. All kindness. Motor brakes!

I often wondered before this War why nations could not settle down like that, or humans make a push for each other to open a space? They do so on Bank Holidays and stop the habit on the following Tuesday morning.

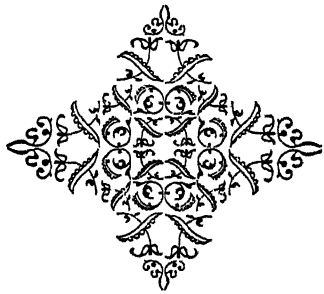
But the public hath said that the talk of these starlings was the sound of motor-brakes! If the nations understood something more about this 'motor-brake' conversation, there would be no cannon.

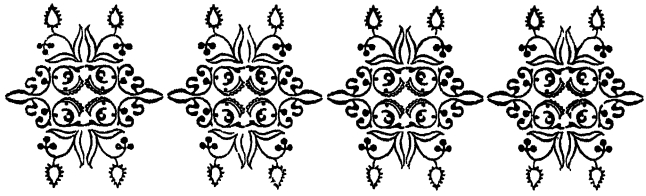
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Said George Herbert:

'One flower makes no garland'.

But go into your rose-patch in October and see one last rose-bud fighting the night frost to tell you what it is. It will re-make in your mind a garland of the Summer that has gone.





SOME GENTLEMEN IN GREY

No man is worthy of his garden who will not let native creatures live in it. His garden ought to be taken away from him. He should be like an Ishmael-motorist who is forbidden to drive again for a number of years because he has committed a grievous offence.

Take squirrels. I have some elm trees at the end of my garden, and the grey squirrels come into it. At least they did, until an elderly gentleman up the road—who also possessed elm trees which were common territory to my grey squirrels—caused all the squirrels that visited his elms to be shot. Now only on occasions does the survivor of a lovely colony visit me.

I was peeved with this gentleman for destroying some beautiful creatures that visited my garden. I told him so. He replied that squirrels were tree-rats. I didn't care if they were tarantula spiders. I liked to see them in my garden.

He said that the grey squirrel had exterminated the red squirrel. I do not believe that fact since reading a very knowledgeable article on the subject which appeared in *The Times* some while ago. It certainly proved scientifically that the guilt of the grey squirrel is an illusion.

I suppose the young squirrel and the young rabbit are the two most beautiful wild creatures that visit our gardens. And every man's hand is against them. There

may be cases of necessity when it should be so. I am quite certain that there are. I make no defence for the young rabbit who—nature-born—likes a half-grown lettuce. Of course the lettuce was planted there for him to eat. What else could a healthy young rabbit with an equally healthy appetite think on a moonlight night?

Just before this slaughter of squirrels began in our road, I had a delightful experience of these creatures. A pair made a nest in an old elm beside my front gate. I first discovered the event when, on a sunny Sabbath morning, I saw three young squirrels ranged with their parents on an overhanging branch, enjoying the sun.

On seeing me, this first adventure of the new family quickly ended. 'When father says turn, we all turn.' In a moment the whole family disappeared into the ivy which enshrouds the tree. They went so quickly that I began to wonder if I had ever seen them.

The days passed, and I used to discover them always on the same familiar bough. Gradually they ceased to be afraid of me. I would go under the bough and watch them, and fling a handful of nuts on the bed immediately beneath, and bits of lettuce. They would stare down at me, look at the waiting banquet, but never move. Never come down. We had become on terms of acquaintance, but we were not yet exchanging visiting-cards.

I drew much delight from the habits of that family. We became so accustomed that the young squirrels would run along the bough as if coming down for the food I had put out. The father uttered no sound. But there must have been something in his eye that gave the signal like that on a London bus—'Safety First'. Whereat the young squirrels would halt and stare.

Before I could be accepted as a real friend of the family, the nest was deserted. Another happy bunch of God's creatures had gone upon their way on the definite purpose of life.

Autumn came. Two years previously I had planted an espalier Doyenne du Comice pear. This year—for the first time—it produced a single pear. I watched that pear grow up. I nursed it; tore away the surrounding leaves so that it should get the full measure of the sun. In the fullness of time I should pick that delicious bit of fruit. So I thought.

Then one Saturday afternoon I went down the path to look at the pear. This solitary thing seemed like an heir to a royal estate. But now I did not see it because it had gone!

I looked around. There was old man squirrel carrying away the pear, humping it along over the celery trenches, and the pear was nearly as big as himself. Seeing me, his antics were those of a master-cracksman caught stealing diamonds in a Park Lane flat. He left the pear hurriedly. He hid behind some celery tops. He came out gingerly watching me. Old man squirrel had a conscience all right. He hid behind the celery once more, then came out again.

I laughed at him, but he did not know I was laughing. He got that pear away under my eyes and disappeared with it into the black-thorn hedge which separates my garden from my neighbour's.

He had our pear. But I wager that he did not get as much enjoyment out of it as I did in watching him steal it. I would give him the whole tree to watch those antics of self-consciousness, chicanery and petty larceny over again.

This is what two famous men have said to me about squirrels. I went over one day to see the late Sir Frederick Treves, the eminent surgeon, at his house in Richmond Park. His garden was infested with grey squirrels. He could not keep them out. The trees of the park concealed a colony.

It was strawberry time.

'Sorry,' he said, 'we've no strawberries for you. The squirrels have had the lot. We used to trap and destroy all squirrels. But I couldn't stand it. It seemed like destroying what belonged to my native Dorset which I love. So now we grow our strawberries for the squirrels.'

On another occasion Bruno Walter, the musical genius, said to me:

'When I am in the U.S.A. my hobby is to fill my pockets with nuts, and go into Central Park and feed the squirrels.' He went on to explain that the squirrel usually buried the nut, and then, by some kink in the squirrel brain, could not find it again.

He was partly right. When a squirrel makes a cache it can always find it. But it has not sufficient intelligence to recover a single nut if it hides one in our garden. Why that should be I do not know.

Sometimes in Winter I go shooting. But I cannot endure people who go shooting and kill anything for the sheer joy of killing.

I had an instance of this a few Winters ago. Whilst waiting at a 'stand' I found a squirrel's cache of beechnuts and other things. Then I saw the squirrel-owner rush up the bole of a tree, obviously very distressed lest I should have observed something.

He ran half way up the tree and sat on a bough. He strove to hide himself whilst still watching me, with his peaky nose and uplifted ears, the only parts of his person visible to me from where I stood. We seemed to converse.

I said: 'I have seen nothing'.

He said: 'You're a liar! You know where *it* is'.

I said: 'Excuse me, this language, when I'm not here to do you any harm!'

He said: 'Excuse me—but I don't believe you'

He skipped to a higher branch, and secreted himself behind the bole of the tree.

A shooting partner came up. 'I saw a squirrel go up that tree,' he said. 'The little devil probably robbed our pheasants' nests.'

'How do you know?' I argued.

'Of course he did. They all do.'

'You've no proof that he ever ate a pheasant's egg in his life,' I retorted.

'Proof enough for me. Let's get him. You stay this side, whilst I go round. We'll get him.'

'Come away,' I said. It was a diplomatic manœuvre. 'The dogs are getting into the next drive.'

He hesitated, then followed me hurriedly.

I could almost hear the squirrel laughing. . . .

Grey squirrels, red squirrels, white squirrels and black. Tree-rats or other rats—I don't care what they are. I once saw a white squirrel in the park near my house, shin up a tree out of the snow, and it was a lovely sight. I have seen the black squirrels in Bronx Park, New York, run up over my boots for nuts or bits of food. If you like an animal, it's an animal to you. You don't bother about its heredity.

If you love an animal which lives in your trees, and leaps in the joy of living from bough to bough, it belongs to your garden. It's an animal. It's a neighbour.

And if you cannot spare it a small measure of your growing so that it—like you—shall live, then you don't deserve to have a garden. Probably long before you had that garden your plot was the playground of its ancestors. And you have stolen it.

* * * *

REMARKS TO AN OLD WHEELBARROW

I ONCE asked H. G. Wells what he considered to be the greatest invention ever made by Man. I knew exactly what he was going to say—the Printing Press. And just as exactly it was what he didn't say! He said it was—the wheel.

Of course he was right. Think about it for a moment. There would be no transport, no connection between nation and nation, except by sea, without the wheel. Nor your motor. Nor a train to carry you anywhere. The world would have remained set as if in granite, but for the discovery of the wheel. Real civilization would have been isolated to the several nations, and, even then, lie there isolated.

I was dragging my old wheelbarrow round the garden when I remembered this sage remark of Wells. The wheelbarrow is the comrade of any gardener, be he amateur or professional. That strange contrivance on one wheel is the best friend of anyone who 'gardens'.

But go with me through one year in the life of my wheelbarrow. We'll begin the year last November and end it now when another Autumn is coming in.

For some years this wheelbarrow has been the best companion of my garden. It was only today, when dragging her around again, that I discovered that any romance could belong to her. Her woodwork has failed a bit—for

she has been up and down those same paths through so many years. But this woodwork has now been refurbished. She has been painted nicely green to hide her scars, and the wear of years. She is like an old lady who puts on her touch of colouring just to conceal—very delicately conceal—those marks which the passage of Time has made. Like an old lady she forgets that when she is old, it is her heart that blossoms, even though Time has marked her face.

She is just like any old wheelbarrow of the great mob of us who 'garden'. If she went on strike, or fell off her solitary pin—her wheel—we would be finished in our gardening for the day. In my garden the failure of the old wheelbarrow would be as full of havoc as a general bus strike would be to the transport of any city.

This old wheelbarrow, which I have dragged for miles across my garden through the years, is a bit weak on her legs—which are the eternal wheel which Wells told me about. I have seen to that. She now looks spry and prim—and you would never guess her age under her new coat of green paint.

So, true and cumbersome as ever and as slow to her duties, she goes up the garden in Autumn bearing her bags of bulbs. She is going to assist in the making of a wonderful April garden next year. She knows it is going to be a wonderful April garden because she has helped to make so many wonderful Aprils before. Quietly, on the Saturdays during the passing years, this load of bulbs has been taken from her—bag by bag. She has disgorged in bags the wonder of next year's Spring. And in the dim of Winter's eve she has been pushed back, hustled back, to her shed.

One Spring has followed another, and, like an old mid-wife, she has helped to deliver a blaze of glory in my tulip beds. Each Spring has thrown its wild glory about my garden. But it has no word of praise for her who has helped to make it.

The glory of the bulb flowers faded, year by year. Summer drew on. The old wheelbarrow, which had borne the whole beauty of this garden whilst yet in bulb form—in embryo form—to make a garden was called into service again. She had to bear away the dead and dying tulips. She became a sort of tumbril that carried victims to the guillotine in the French Revolution. Or, I could more nearly compare it to the burial cart of the plague of London which came round demanding to take away the dead.

All these dead and dying things she is now employed to bear away. Months ago she carried up to the top garden bags of bulbs which held all the promise of future life. That blaze of Spring came out of her garden. And now she is carrying to the funeral pyre those remnants of a glorious Spring she helped to make.

But, lest the old wheelbarrow should become depressed, we'll load her again with new life. Young asters, stocks and antirrhinums, the ageratum edgings. We'll pile her high with the babies that will make a pageant for Summer.

So we charge her up with young plants. And she waits at the various beds, like an old patient horse, whilst we put the plants in. She has done this so often before. She is trundled from spot to spot, and spills her burden to make another Summer.

Now Autumn has come again. The first frosts have smitten the garden. The asters hang their ugly mildewed heads. The dahlias are dying night by night. Death lies in the garden. Winter is pushing its way to kill the garden. It intends to kill the garden.

So the old wheelbarrow again becomes the carrier of death. The glorious young life it carried some months ago has departed with another Summer. It carries now the sleeping dahlia roots to their accustomed store. It carries the dead annuals to the burning pyre. And soon it will

carry the bags of bulbs up the garden again, joyfully to the promise of new life.

It has been doing this for years. And it will do it for a little longer. Perhaps it does not understand why a garden never ends. Why there is no rest.

Old wheelbarrow—the new bulbs have just come in. I am going to pile the bags into you. It's going to be a wonderful Spring, even if each night now brings the breath of Winter's frost. You've got to stagger on to next Spring. It may be your last before you go to the funeral pyre.

What have I arranged for next Spring? You stand there like a servile horse, whilst I pile the bags on to you. . . Two beds of *Tulipe Noire*. You remember that we always have these. And I rather fancy *Madame Krelage* for the star bed. You will recall how delicate she is, with her lilac-rose and rose-pink. She is so lovely in her opening that I think the other Darwins will look round at her with a side-glance such as one might fling to a pretty lady.

We must have a splash of yellow. And in all our Autumns, old wheelbarrow, have we planted a more lovely yellow than *Mrs. Moon* with her out-curving petals . . .? Yes; we've planted her often. You and I have snooped around the Autumn garden—and you waiting there whilst I worked on her planting.

You would like a change from *Mrs. Moon?* It can't be done. I'm in love with *Mrs. Moon.* And the Man in the Moon is more in love with her than I. For he looks down on her in the cloudless nights of May, and gives her a garment of gold. You haven't noticed that, old wheelbarrow? Well, I have. He clothes her with shining gold.

Two more loads on your back. *Bartignon*, for the bed near the elms. Her fiery crimson gives warmth to the dusk. You can look at her in the dimness—when she is

putting up her shutters for the night. And you can feel the warmth there—just that warmth you receive from a dead fire in which a few embers still live. Even when the May night comes down I shall stroll down the path in the warm wind and see *Bartignon* faintly aglow, and waiting to blaze with the morning sun.

I suppose that if you treat an old wheelbarrow kindly, it will agree to anything that will make next year's Spring. In its ageing it may creak and revolt as it carries bags of bulbs or plants to the destined beds for Spring or Summer. It may creak and revolt as it carries back the dead plants, those plants which it bore so cheerfully in their youth—back to the funeral pyre.

Now, soon the old wheelbarrow will go to the same pyre. Or her sides may be beaten out to form part of a run for the young wild ducks in my orchard. Or to make part of a hutch for a white angora rabbit! A white angora rabbit—when this noble and ancient barrow has borne all the colours of the rainbow to life and to death!

But old wheelbarrows have to go. This one will go as certainly as an aged city clerk, grown old in service, disappears to a Somewhere which nobody knows.



SUMMER'S PALL-BEARERS

SUMMER is departing. My garden is like an old lady who is dying quietly by inches. Brave and proud about it—but dying. The heaviness of death lingers damply, coldly, on the evening air, and seems to droop quietly about her bed—the shroud she knows is coming.

For several days now Summer's pall-bearers—the swallows—have been clustering on the telephone wires outside the gate, chattering rapidly in earnest conversation about something. They seemed to cluster more closely as the certainty of Summer's death became the more apparent. And their heads are all turned in the same way—towards the South.

Tennyson called the swallow 'Nature's licensed vagabond'. But what a belovéd vagabond!

How we watched for him in the first warming days of last Spring. He was late. The cold and grey skies had been long in their going.

Then one morning he swept across the garden in the bright of sunshine. He swung low over our little garden. He turned and came back so that we should know he had truly arrived. He knew we should hail him, just as we might hail an incoming aeroplane that brings to us something we wanted. So came this single swallow that brought us another Summer.

More swallows arrived, and a pair of them built a little mud-hut under the eave. Just as Thompson forecasted when he wrote:

'The swallow sweeps
The slimy pool, to build a hanging house.'

In the process of weeks this swallow and his wife brought out three young. They ranged themselves—during the nursery period—along a projecting water-pipe. The mouths of these three were at first yellow yawning craters into which were poured an endless indigestion of small worms. They fledged, these young. They became of age. Then, according to plan, they joined the hosts of other swallows in the sky. I recognized them no longer as they snatched at flies over the brook when the weather gave depression. And I lost them high in the blue when there was 'no depression over the Atlantic'.

But here they are now—dozens of them—twittering and chattering on the telegraph-wires. They are the pall-bearers of another Summer but it matters to them not at all. They are excited like glad and carefree people preparing for a long tour.

In a recent year I was in the Autumn garden early one morning. The swallows were still there, chattering as usual. It was a bright morning of sun. Presently I saw them 'take off'. They went, the strong and the weak, like a host of small aeroplanes rising higher and higher in the sky until a gentle mist hid them from me. The sun glistened across the sheen of their dark-blue backs as they went.

Mid-day arrived, but no birds returned. At evening the telegraph-wire was deserted.

I had witnessed the funeral of a Summer.

I have never discovered whether the swallow is attached to human beings as are the starlings and the rooks. Or whether it is merely selfish in clinging to human habitations as necessary at nesting time. A mud nest would hang most unhappily on a tree.

I rather suspect the swallow of selfishness. For this reason. Some years ago a pair of swallows built a nest under the thatched roof of a wooden cottage of my acquaintance. A cottage more than two hundred years old. In due time the aged inhabitants evacuated it since it was no longer safe to live in.

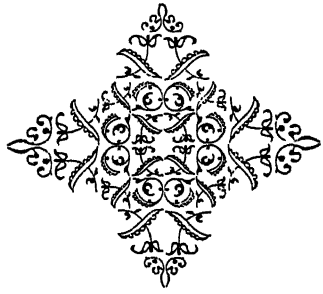
At length, one winter, the cottage collapsed under the beat of a gale. Collapsed like a pack of cards, with eaved roof settled down like an inverted V on the ground.

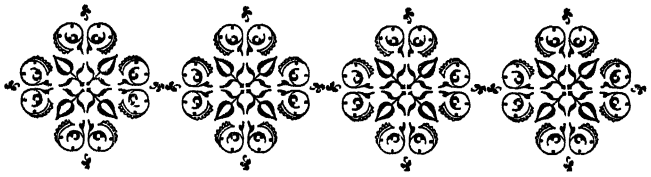
Spring came. No one thought to take the wreckage away. It was in a lonely spot in Dorset where a disturbance of this kind did not matter to anyone. But one day, at the end of June, I passed this wreckage of the cottage. Wild grass had grown up in its crevices. Rats had worried and fretted with the under woodwork. But beneath the collapsed roof a pair of swallows had made their nest as usual —a nest no higher than six feet from the ground. And, more wonderful still, two fledgelings were sitting happily in the sun on the broken iron guttering.

Were they the same pair that had known this place for years? If they were not, would a pair make a nest which could easily be robbed from the ground? The swallow, the martin, is most careful in its idea of security.

The swallow is glad to go when Autumn puts the cold about your gardens. This chattering on the telegraph-wire is all gladness. If there is any complaint, any fear of the journey they are about to undertake, in these last chatterings, we do not know of it. These birds are all stoics. They go as some triumphal and disciplined host to carry out a journey—a journey planned by Nature. A few of the weaker may fall on the way, but the swallow in migration flies only at half speed so that the weaker may survive.

Many have twittered their swan-song on that telephone-wire, and will never come back. Many more will return, bringing the resurrection of a Summer—the wild, flashing messengers of an April day—to glad sun and heat and the process of nests and Life, to which order a God has assigned them.





FAREWELL! DEAD YEAR!

FAREWELL! dead year!
Your pageant gone, you die in Death's decay;
Tomorrow's flowers are but the thoughts of Yesterday,
And those you brought lie on the garden pyre.

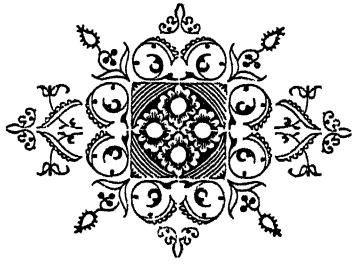
The Autumn dropped some dead leaves on your bier
Not for farewell, because no Autumn dies;
Its bronzen crown goes through the troop of years.
But you are dead. . . . Your last long breath
Has drawn the garden to the Solitudes of Sleep.
Your deadened leaves, that held your majesty, lie now
Like little mourners on your place of pride,
To move no more, nor care not, nor will they care again,
For you are dead. . . .

No further flower you'll see, nor hear the birds,
Nor know the Summertime of bees which once was sweet to you.
For you will come the darkened wood, the creaking boughs,
The saddened pour of rain will make your sorrowed nights,
And the long beat of Winter hammer out your death.

Farewell! dead year!
Drunk with the colour of your days, you've swept away

To leave some crocus working in its sleep
That shall arise in Spring and make your heritage;
A burst of yellow from a purge of snow
To start Tomorrow's year.

Farewell! dead year!
In dim up-rising shapes the smoke of pyres has borne away
your flowers.
The garden—drowsy now—remembers you no more,
Nor will remember you, till Summer shapes herself again
To make anew the pattern of her God.



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